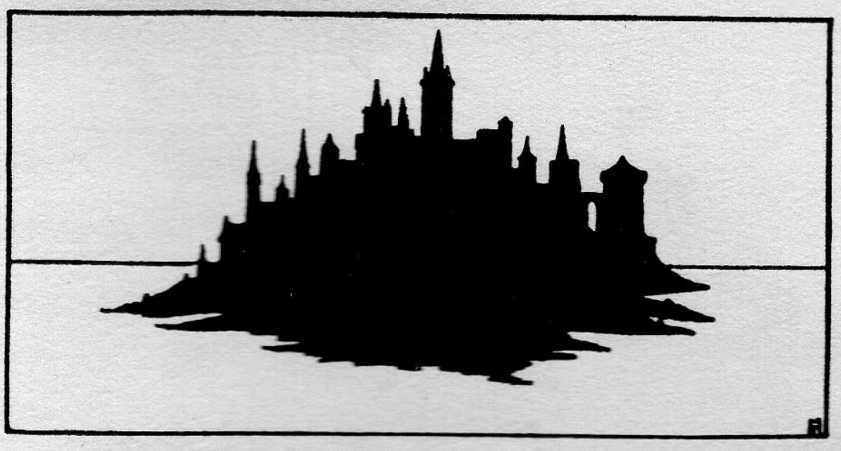
WILLIAM THOMAS HORTON

A
SELECTION OF HIS WORK
WITH
A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

WH.

WILLIAM
THOMAS
HORTON



W. T. Horton.

Frontispiece.

William Thomas Horton

(1864 — 1919)

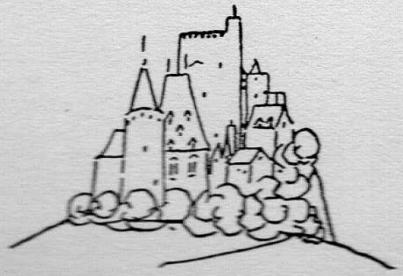
A Selection of His Work

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

BY

ROGER INGPEN



LONDON

INGPEN AND GRANT

37 MUSEUM STREET, BLOOMSBURY, W.C.1.

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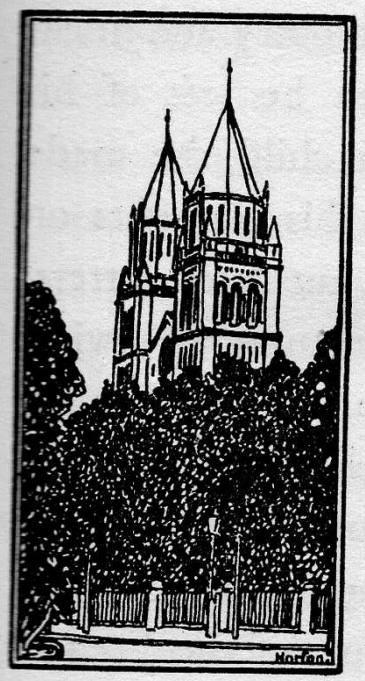
WILLIAM THOMAS HORTON

WILLIAM THOMAS HORTON



WITH the death of William Thomas Horton at Hove on February 19th, 1919, there passed away a man of remarkable personality. He was not widely known to the general public, but his gifts were highly appreciated by a small circle who are faithful to the conviction that his work is destined to a wider recognition in the future. There is little doubt that along certain lines his drawings, limited both by his taste, or inclinations, and his powers, reveal in a variety of phases an extraordinarily interesting mind. Practically the whole of the large collection of his drawings, the results of over twenty-five years incessant labour, remain unpublished, and, except to his intimate friends, unrevealed. Horton, for some years before his death, laid down a plan of life for himself and was fortunate in being in a position to pursue it without having to consider outside influences and distractions.

Horton was born on June 27th, 1864, at Brussels

of English parents. His people originally belonged to Ashford, in Kent, but his father's occupation had caused him to travel extensively over Europe for many years before settling down in the Belgian capital, where Will, as he was called, received his early education, and learned for a time geometry and linear drawing. In a brief record, which he left of his earliest days, he tells us that, as a child, he made one or two attempts to put down his thoughts on paper. About this time he used to cut faces, letters, and names out of wood, and he remembered trying to use a stone-cutter's hammer and chisel, but he could not manage them. From childhood he was passionately fond of books and pictures. Among his early impressions he remembered the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the departure of the French residents in Brussels to join their regiments.

While still a boy, his family moved to Brighton, and I believe at that date he could speak English hardly at all, or at least imperfectly. He was sent to Brighton Grammar School, where, some years later, Aubrey Beardsley became a pupil. I understand that the school cherishes memories of these two artists, who had much in common.

On leaving school, Horton was articled to a Brighton architect, and studied building-construction at a local School of Art. In 1887 he went to the Royal

Academy Architectural School and passed from the lower to the upper school, but he said that he never obtained a prize or did anything but very average work. His only exhibit at the Royal Academy was in 1890, when he showed a pen and ink design for a theatre façade. At first he liked architecture, but as time went on he grew to detest it. He had strong leanings towards literature and decided to submit a story to, and seek the advice of, Mr. Thomas Hardy, who had also studied architecture before he became a writer. Mr. Hardy, who wrote him a kind letter, did not wish what he described as his "casual suggestions" to be taken as counsel: he returned the story, which he pronounced as "fairly good" and said, "my general opinion is that you should on no account desert the architectural profession with a view of making a better income by literature. Should you have a strong literary bias you might possibly combine practical architecture with contributions on architectural subjects to the art periodicals and magazines. A speciality gives more opportunities, I am informed, than none, and editors more readily accept such papers. Your knowledge of French might materially assist if you kept yourself acquainted with the doings of the architectural world abroad by means of French periodicals devoted to that profession. Modern movements on the

Continental architecture are, I believe, little known in England or written about."

He seems to have taken Mr. Hardy's advice as he obtained work in an architect's office, but he confessed that he could not do his best in trying to carry out the ideas of his employers and so gave up the idea of working for others. In November 1893 he tried to start a practice of his own which he abandoned in disgust, after a couple of months' trial. This must have been, I think, just before I first met him. The only architectural design of his that I ever saw was the carefully executed elevation of the Theatre. Although architecture ceased to interest him as a profession, he never entirely lost interest in it, and his training as a draughtsman served him well when he took up drawing.

In the early nineties he applied to me in regard to the *bona fides* of a person with whom he was about to engage in some literary enterprise. We found that we had many tastes and interests in common, and at once struck up a friendship which only ended with Horton's death. He had just married, and was living at Brixton, but he shortly afterwards moved to Redhill, where I visited him several times. He loved walking, and I remember many a long country ramble with him. He then went to Brighton and remained there for many years.

W. T. HORTON

An Early Portrait
from a Photograph

To face p. 6.

Having abandoned the plan of making architecture his profession shortly after he left London, he had to think of a way of making a livelihood. He possessed some means of his own, but he felt it was necessary to supplement them. He tried writing—he never ceased to have literary ambitions—and started a small magazine called *Whispers—A Magazine for Surrey Folk.* This little periodical which was published at Redhill and of which only four numbers were published, was partly edited and largely written by Horton himself. He was at that time an enthusiastic student of Balzac, and the early chapters of a serial story entitled " The Mystic Will," written under the influence of the great French writer and with a suggestion of Dickens, appeared as a serial in *Whispers*, and it was still running when the magazine ceased to appear. I am under the impression, though I am not certain, that Horton completed the novel, but it was never published in its entirety. The story, as far as it was printed, contained a realistic description of life in a cheap boarding house, in the dreary neighbourhood of King's Cross, and was drawn from actual experience and belonged to that period between leaving school and his marriage when he was beginning life in London. Horton always retained a sense of the humorous, and his story exhibited some characteristic touches of grim humour mingled with a background of rather drab realism.

While at Redhill, Horton joined the Artists' Corps as a private, and recorded his experiences of the Easter manœuvres at Walmer in the *Volunteer Record* for February 18th, 1893. Horton as a soldier was by no means incongruous. There was something distinctly military in his upright carriage and step. During the War, although considerably over age and in indifferent health, he went into training so as to be ready to serve if called upon. His adventure with *Whispers* was not the only occasion on which he attempted to obtain a footing on a periodical by purchasing an interest. At one time he acquired a share in a publishing business, but his connection with it was of short duration.

He first turned his attention to art while he was living at Redhill. He has left a record that he began to study oil-painting and chalk-drawing on October 3rd, 1893. I remember that he showed me some of his drawings when I visited him at Redhill, and he gave me one of his early attempts. Although very crude, it possesses a touch of originality such as is so often noticeable in the work of self-taught artists, and which was never entirely absent from his work. But as soon as he had decided to devote himself to drawing, he applied himself to it with his characteristic enthusiasm. He visited London frequently with his portfolio, and we invariably met either in town or at my

house. Sometimes he would make a night of it and we would put him up. His portfolio would be produced and his drawings discussed. Walter de la Mare would perhaps drop in, when long literary arguments would ensue. *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau* by Mr. Wells, Lombroso's *The Man of Genius* and other books of the day gave rise to all kinds of speculations relating to the possibility of undeveloped mental faculties. These speculations seemed to have an irresistible attraction for Horton. Among the French books that he read at this time, the influence of which is very noticeable, were practically all the works of Théophile Gautier (and he specially admired the *Émaux et Camées*) ; the poetry of François Villon, which resulted in several drawings, one of which appeared in the *Savoy ;* Baudelaire and Alexandre Dumas fils. We took in the *Gil Blas Illustré*, and Horton never ceased to express admiration for the work of Steinlen, whose drawings were appearing week by week with unfailing regularity, and were the chief justification of that daring periodical. But the technique of Aubrey Beardsley's work was undoubtedly a source of inspiration to Horton, and he would sometimes speak of the beauty of Beardsley's line almost in despair. He paid a visit to Beardsley whom he described as entirely unspoiled by his great success, and who gave

him some words of encouragement at a time when he had hitherto obtained little encouragement elsewhere.

His association with Beardsley was continued when the *Savoy* was started in 1896, under the editorship of Mr. Arthur Symons. Horton was justly proud when the following of his drawings were accepted for this publication, to which Beardsley was the chief artist-contributor :—

In No. 2.—Three Visions. A vignette and cul-de-lampe for a poem by Leila Macdonald.

No. 4.—A vignette and cul-de-lampe for a poem by Ford Madox Hueffer.

No. 6.—A drawing for Villon's *Ballade des Pendus.*

No. 7.—A drawing to illustrate the lines of Keats :

" Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight without pain."

The last-named of these drawings, which is reproduced in the present volume, is of course manifestly based on the well-known sketch of the dying poet, made by his devoted friend Servern.

Horton was now turning with increased interest towards symbolic art, and he developed a note which is peculiarly his own in the course of the next two

years. In the meantime he had made some friendships among the artists and poets of the day, and his work was sympathetically received by them. The chief outcome of this new development was a collection of his drawings issued by the Unicorn Press in 1898, under the title of *A Book of Images* with an introduction by his friend Mr. W. B. Yeats, who said in reference to the illustrations that Horton " has his waking dreams and copies them in his drawings as if they were models posed for him by some earthly master. A disciple of perhaps the most mediæval movement in modern mysticism, he has delighted in picturing the streets of mediæval German towns, and the castles of mediæval romances ; and, at moments, as in *All Thy waves have gone over me*, the images of a kind of humorous piety, like that of the mediæval miracle-plays and moralities. Always interesting when he pictures the principal symbols of his faith, the woman of *Rosa Mystica* and *Ascending into Heaven*, who is the Divine womanhood, the man-at-arms of St. George, and *Be Strong*, who is the Divine manhood, he is at his best in picturing the Magi, who are the wisdom of the world, uplifting their thuribles before the Christ, who is the union of the Divine manhood and the Divine womanhood. The rays of the halo, the great beams of the manger, the rich ornament of the thuribles and of the cloaks, make up

a pattern where the homeliness come of his pity mixes with an elaborateness come of his adoration. Even the phantastic landscapes, the entangled chimneys against a white sky, the dark valley with its little points of light, the cloudy and fragile towns and churches, are part of the history of a soul ; for Mr. Horton tells me that he has made them spectral, to make himself feel all things but a waking dream ; and whenever spiritual purpose mixes with artistic purpose, and not to its injury, it gives it a new sincerity, a new simplicity. He tried at first to copy his models in colour, and with little mastery over colour when even great mastery would not have helped him, and very literally : but soon found that you could only represent a world where nothing is still for a moment, and where colours have odours and odours have musical notes, by formal and conventional images, midway between scenery and persons of common life, and the geometrical emblems on mediæval talismans. His images are still few, though they are becoming more plentiful, and will probably be always but few ; for he who is content to copy common life need never repeat an image, because his eyes show him always changing scenes, and none that can be copied ; but there must always be a certain monotony in the work of the symbolist, who can only make symbols out of the things that he loves."

The Book of Images was followed by a volume containing a series of drawings illustrating Edgar Allan Poe's *Raven* and *The Pit and the Pendulum*, which was published by Leonard Smithers with an introduction by Vincent O'Sullivan. These illustrations are not, however, among Horton's best work. There were, besides, two other books for which he was responsible, namely *The Grig Book* in 1900, a series of quaint coloured drawings illustrating a collection of old nursery rhymes, which has become very rare owing to the fact that a great part of the edition was destroyed by fire, and *The Way of a Soul*, " a legend in line and verse " which he both wrote and illustrated. The Hon. Ralph Shirley in his Foreword says that " the aim of the symbolical pictures of which this book consists is to portray the upward struggle of the soul of man through conflict and effort on the material plane to the realisation of the higher self." It is certain that Horton believed, at any rate for the greater part of his life, that he in his work was impelled by some occult influence. He was for many years much interested in Spiritualism and *The Way of a Soul* was produced at a time when it filled a considerable part of his life. I am not qualified to speak on this subject, but judged merely as drawings some of them are very beautiful, and nearly all of them show that his technique was

improving. The influence of William Blake, for whose work Horton had the greatest admiration, is noticeable both in these drawings and in the simple verses which accompany them. He was always indignant whenever he heard Blake described as " mad," and when he came across the mention of a person named Blake as an inmate of Bedlam, he set himself the task of tracing the origin of the statement and at length found it in a French periodical. The account purported to describe a visit to the poet in Bedlam and was plausible enough, but Horton was not satisfied and caused a search to be made among the records of Bethlehem Hospital, where no mention of a Blake between the years 1815 and 1835 (the date of the article) could be found.*

For many years Horton belonged to the Brotherhood of the New Life. I do not know for how long, or when he relinquished his membership. He was singularly unworldly and deeply religious, and most of his writings which remain in manuscript are concerned with religion and art. Latterly he seems to have attended the services of Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral indiscriminately. He was also passionately devoted to music and attended concerts; but he possessed no technical knowledge of music.

* See Horton s article " Was Blake ever in Bedlam " in *The Occult Review*, November, 1912.

It is noticeable that his drawings may be classed into distinct groups covering certain periods of time. When one or another of these phases was worked out he generally abandoned it for something new. Horton, who was keenly interested in studying the development of his mind, kept a written record of his work, in which he numbered and dated each of his drawings.

He also left some very brief records of his life, but the chief was his "work diary" from the year 1895 until his death. This diary, consisting for the most part of a line or two to a day, contains the record of his drawings, each of which was carefully numbered, of his literary work, his appointments, visits to London, and his excursions abroad. One gathers that he found it increasingly difficult to settle down anywhere for long. Brighton, perhaps chiefly on account of family ties, but also because the air suited him, held him longest, but he fretted a good deal even there, and if he had not been able to come up to London frequently, he probably would not have endured it as long as he did.

In September 1900, Horton resolved to leave Brighton and moved with his family to a house which he had taken on a lease of some years in Albion Road, St. John's Wood, where I remember dining with him soon after his arrival. All his belongings were

arranged, and he spoke of having at last found a place that entirely satisfied him. He very soon, however, repented of having made the change, as he found it impossible to work in his new surroundings, and shortly afterwards he returned to the house in Brighton, which he had left only two months before. This experience, if it left him more reconciled to Brighton, did not cure that restlessness which possessed him almost to the end of his life. In the Spring of 1904 he made a voyage to South Africa, apparently with the object of remaining there, but he did little more than land, look round Cape Town, and return home by the next boat.

In the August of that year he decided to divide his time between London and Brighton, and he took lodgings in Smith Square, Westminster, but two months later he engaged a room in Cheyne Row, Chelsea, where he seems to have spent most of his time until 1907. In August 1908 he paid a flying visit to Moscow, and in 1911 he went to America for a couple of months, and visited the Yellowstone Park. He also went several times to France during these years, and sometimes attended classes for drawing from the nude, a branch of study which he had hitherto neglected. In 1910 he migrated to Hampstead, where he lived for some years, at one time in a house on the Heath, and afterwards in

the town. He finally occupied quarters in an old house in Cartwright Square, Bloomsbury, where he spent some years of tranquillity and happiness, but latterly a period of sorrow.

Horton was always more or less a solitary. One can figure the little English boy in Belgium who could only speak French, and later the boy from Belgium at his school in Brighton who spoke English only with difficulty. He was like an exile belonging to another and a better country ; an idealist who was for ever seeking for perfection in a world where perfection does not exist. He dwelt in a world that was his own. When he lived in Chelsea memories of Whistler still hung about the place and he viewed it as the Latin Quarter of London without venturing to familiarise himself with the studio life of that district. Westminster, Hampstead, and Bloomsbury were each invested by him with the glamour of romance because he contented himself with externals and traditions, and never discovered that they are as commonplace as any other parts of London. Perhaps he was the happier for this detachment from the crude realities of life. His world was mainly a world of dreams or waking visions, and the greater part of his work consisted in portraying these fleeting images. They seem to have been something more than the result of that gift, which all artists possess in a greater or lesser

degree, namely of visualisation. In the brief record which he left of his earliest childhood he said that he always felt that he was surrounded by unseen beings. This feeling was continued throughout life, so that he could not bear darkness. He had visions from the earliest time that he could remember, and one especially of two men in armour, who appeared at night offering him a crown on a cushion.

Horton had a very friendly and charming manner and made acquaintances readily, but he was rather over-sensitive to gain many friends. The few that he did possess were devoted to him and could testify to his warm and generous nature. If you chanced to meet him he was nearly always alone, he would be ready to talk and to go with you wherever you wanted to take him. I can never forget his fine upright figure, the frank, friendly look of greeting in his blue eyes and his hearty laugh.

In 1916 he suffered a severe loss in the death of a cherished friend, from which shock he never entirely recovered. He seemed to be a changed man without much interest in life. But he went about his work and could generally be seen, day after day, in his accustomed place in the Reading Room of the British Museum writing industriously.

During the many years that I had known him, his health had been fairly good, but he paid rather too

much attention in later years to his diet ; indeed no one could know him for long without noticing how much it occupied his thoughts. He was for ever trying to find a diet which would enable him to produce his best work. He practised vegetarianism from time to time, and made frequent changes in his food, always tending to frugality ; which undoubtedly affected his spirits and reduced his vitality. In the days of the war, like many others, he probably suffered from malnutrition.

Early in 1918 he was knocked down in a London street by a motor-car, but apparently he recovered from this accident. His diary, however, records that in the April of that year he consulted a doctor who assured him that there was nothing seriously amiss, and for a time he appears to have regained his normal health, but the symptoms recurred. It was really the beginning of his fatal illness. His eyesight was failing, and for the first time he had been obliged to take to glasses.

Although he was leading the lonely life of an ascetic in his rooms at Cartwright Gardens, he was not entirely a solitary, as he still went about seeing a few friends, such as Sir H. Rider Haggard, Lady Gregory or Mr. W. B. Yeats, and keeping up his life-long habit of visiting the Theatres. But a little story which he told me seems to emphasise the loneliness of his last days

in Bloomsbury. His rooms were on the top storey of a large house, and were reached by a large winding staircase. One Saturday night he returned home late, there was no one else in the house, and ascended the stairs in the dark. Carrying a heavy bag, he could not put out his hand for the baluster rail, as was his custom. When he got to the top of the stairs and turned on the light, he saw that the entire balusters and rails had been removed that day without his knowledge, and there was no one to warn him that they had gone. Nothing could have saved him from falling over into the well of the stairs had he leaned over to the right in ascending them.

The last time I saw him in London was on Sunday, September 10th, 1918. He had written a few days earlier to say that he wanted me to see " some colour effects in oil," which, however, he was " not showing to brother artists as the idea is still evolving." So he came to my house and spent the afternoon and evening with me. We had not met for some months, and he seemed to be altered and perceptibly ageing, but he did not complain except of his weakening sight. This he regarded as a somewhat serious matter on account of his work. He brought with him a large parcel containing a series of oil-paintings ; the result of his recent labours. They could not be described as compositions, but rather as consisting of harmonious blends

of colour without any attempt at form or design, but suggesting landscapes or mountain scenery under gorgeous sunsets or weird sky effects. He intended to hold an exhibition later in the year of these productions, which were apparently the last of his works.

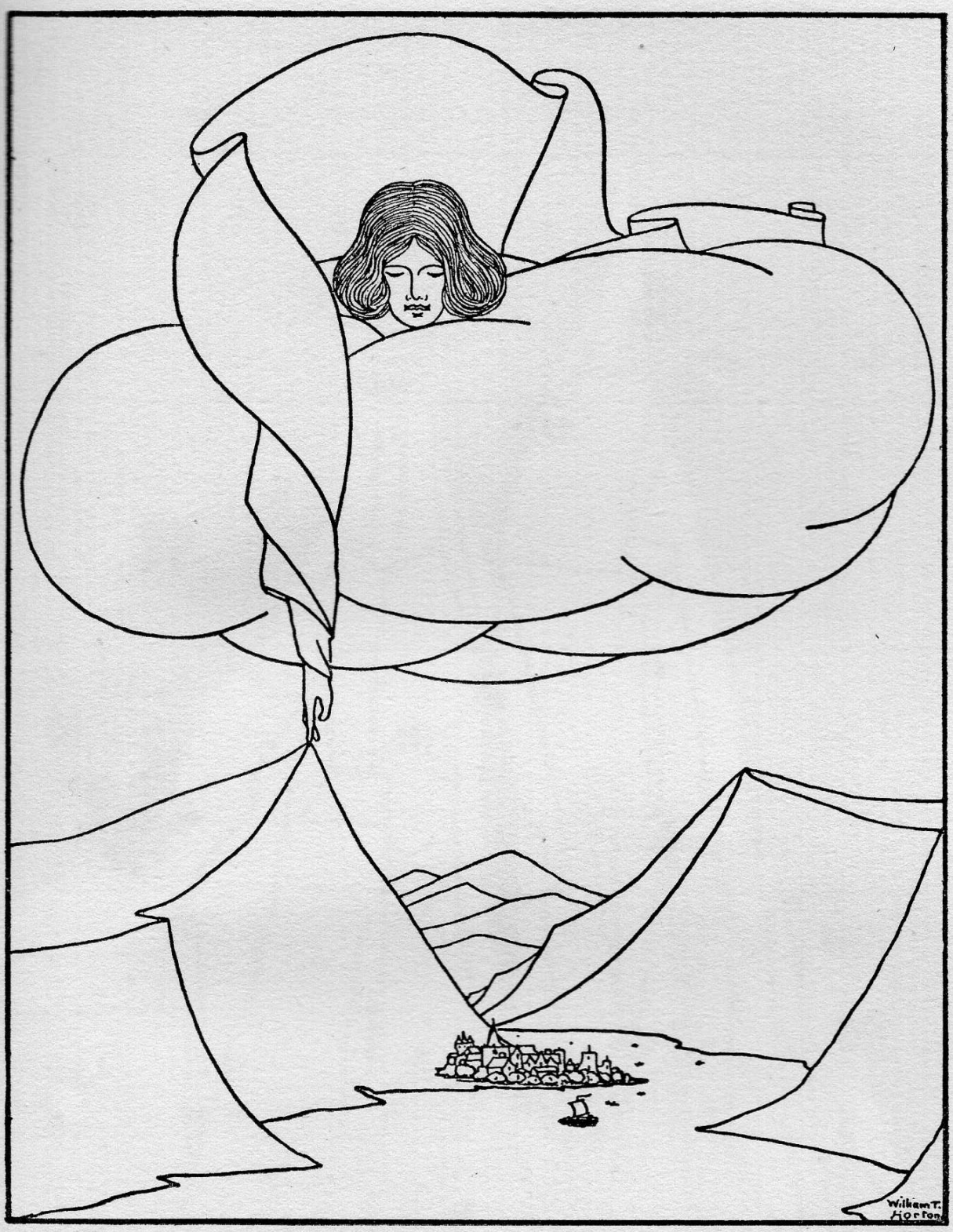
On October 4th Horton left London to see his sister at York Road, Hove, and on the 10th of that month he had a complete breakdown. He wrote to tell me that he was in loving hands and that all was being done for him that affection could do. He admitted that his illness, which was due to lack of proper food and care, had been coming on for a long time. In the last note he wrote to me, on December 12th, he said, "Tu ne seras pas supris d'entendre que je vais devenir un R.C., il n'y'a pas d'autre moyen pour moi." He was received into the Catholic Church on the feast of the Epiphany, 1919, and passed away fortified by the Last Sacraments, on February 19th. He rests in the family grave at Ashford, Kent. R.I.P.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Savoy
NOV. 1896

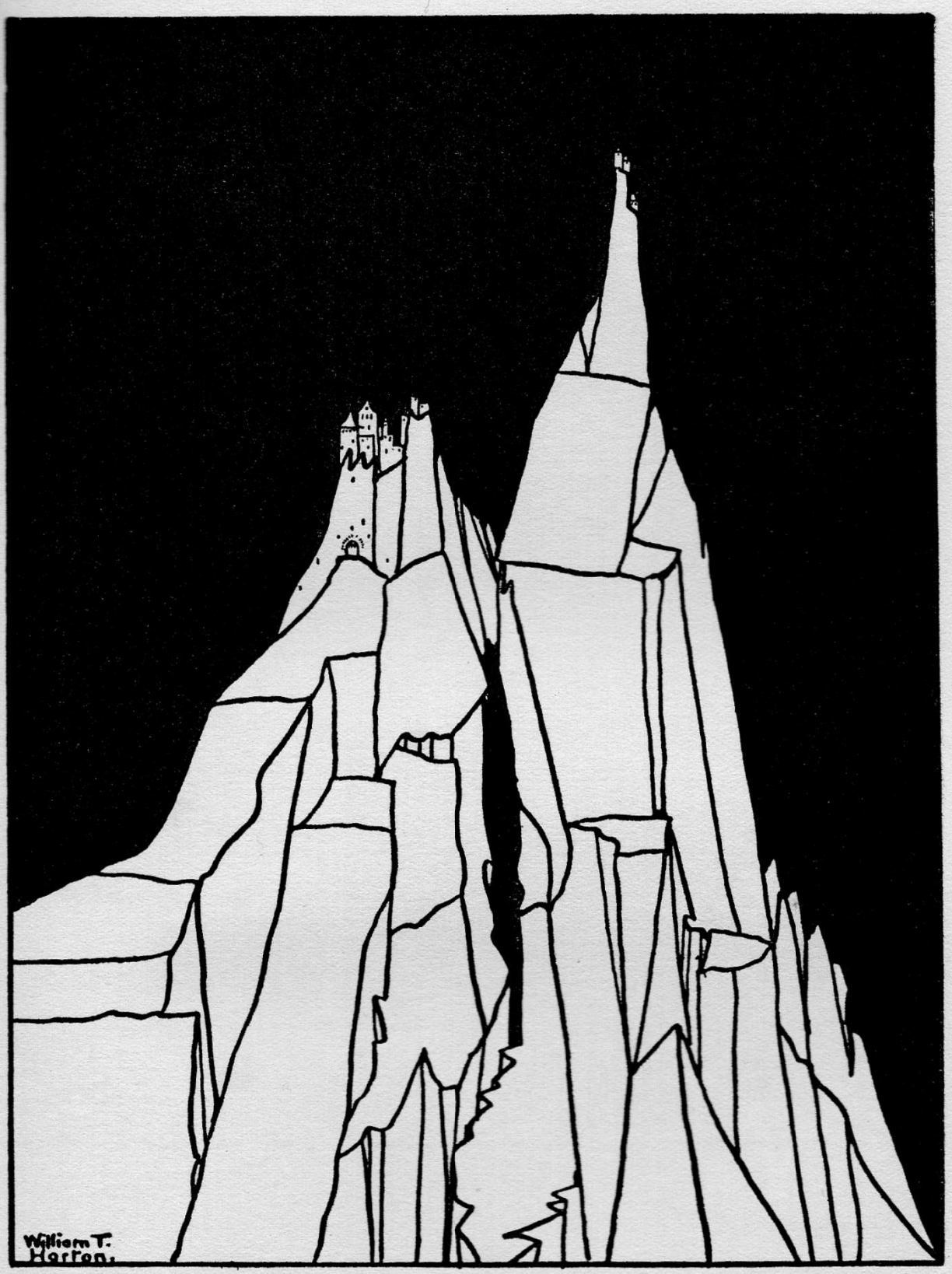
KEATS

"Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain."

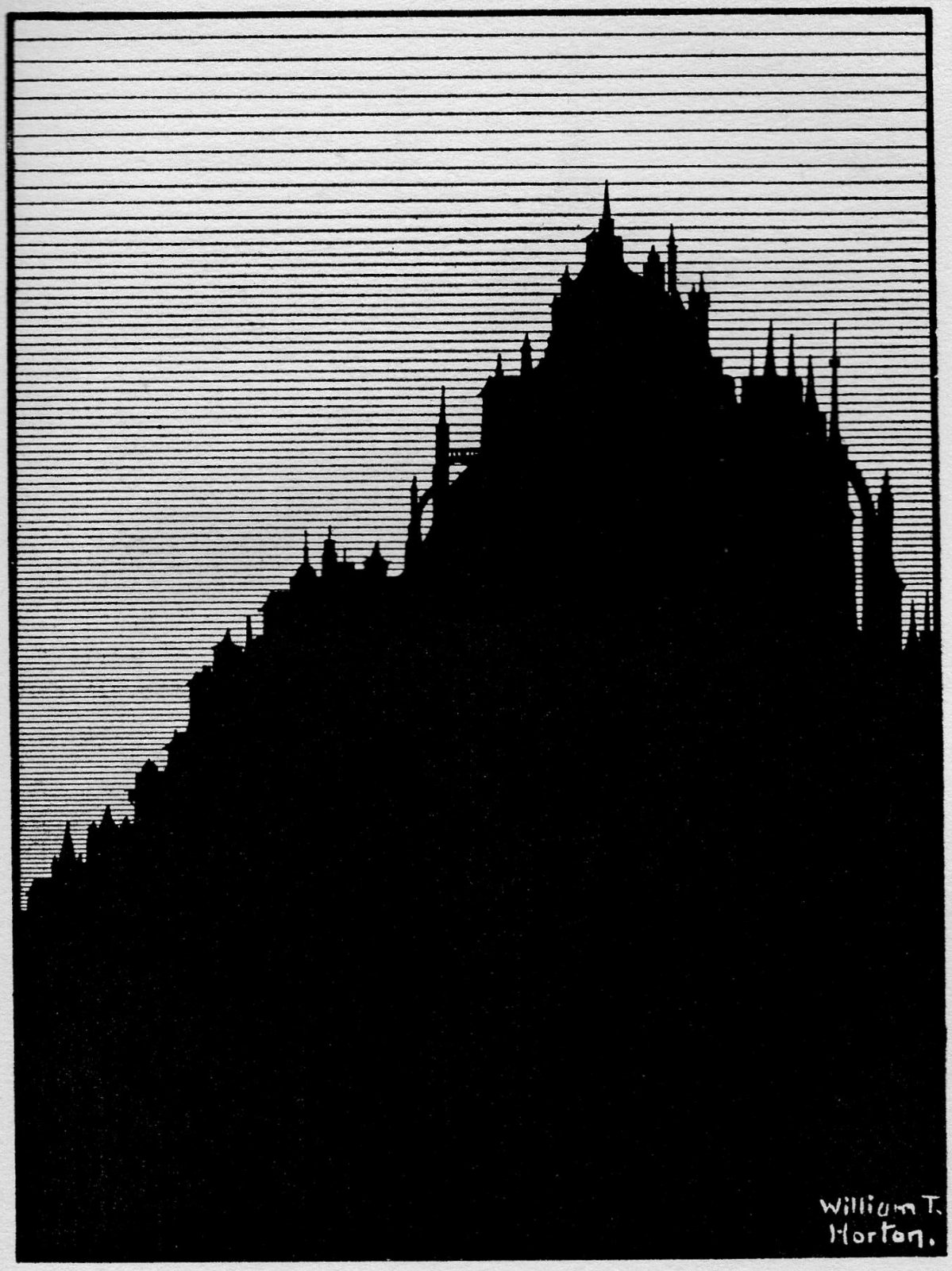


APRIL 19, 1897

DAWN



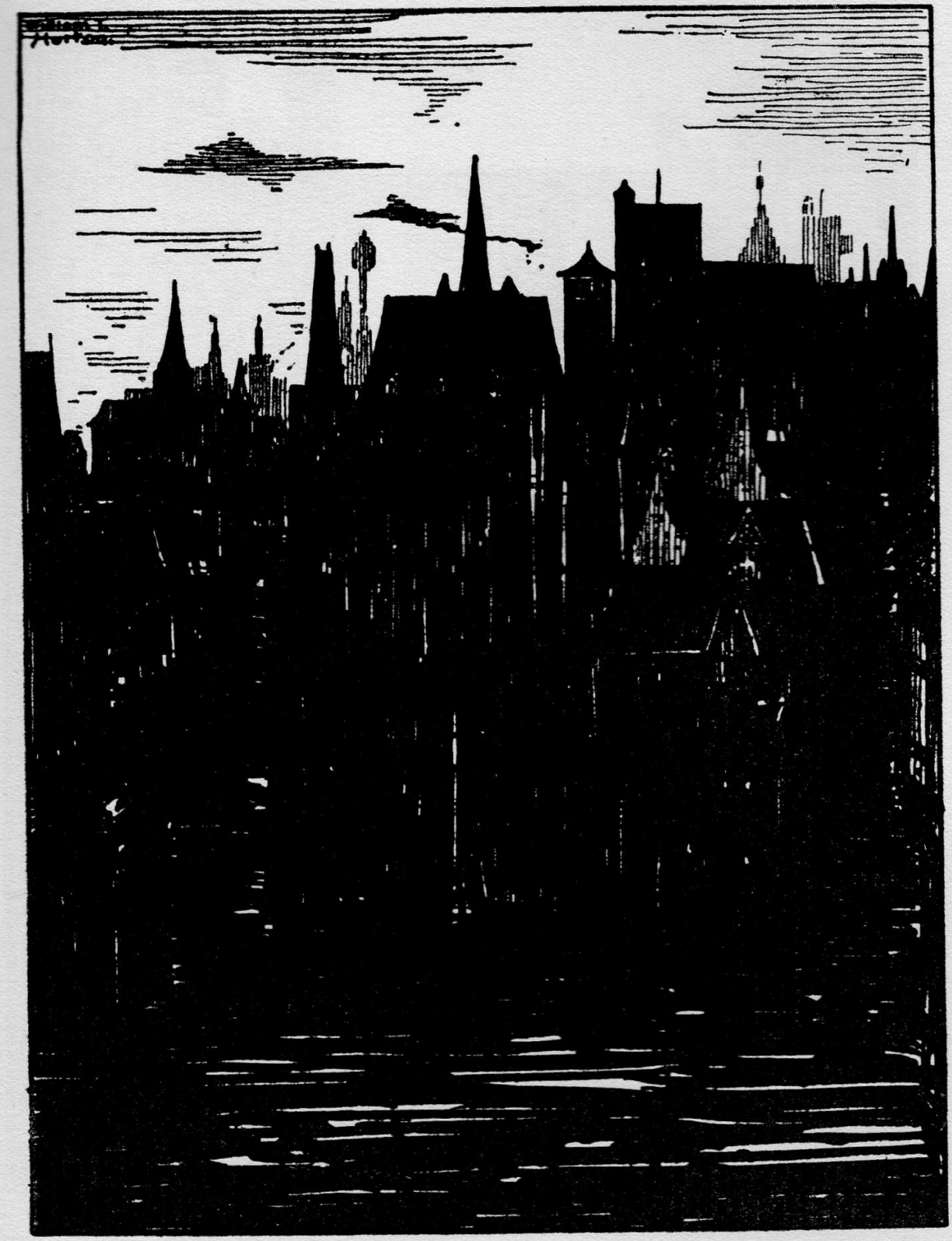
AUG. 11, 1897 CHATEAU DU GRÉPON



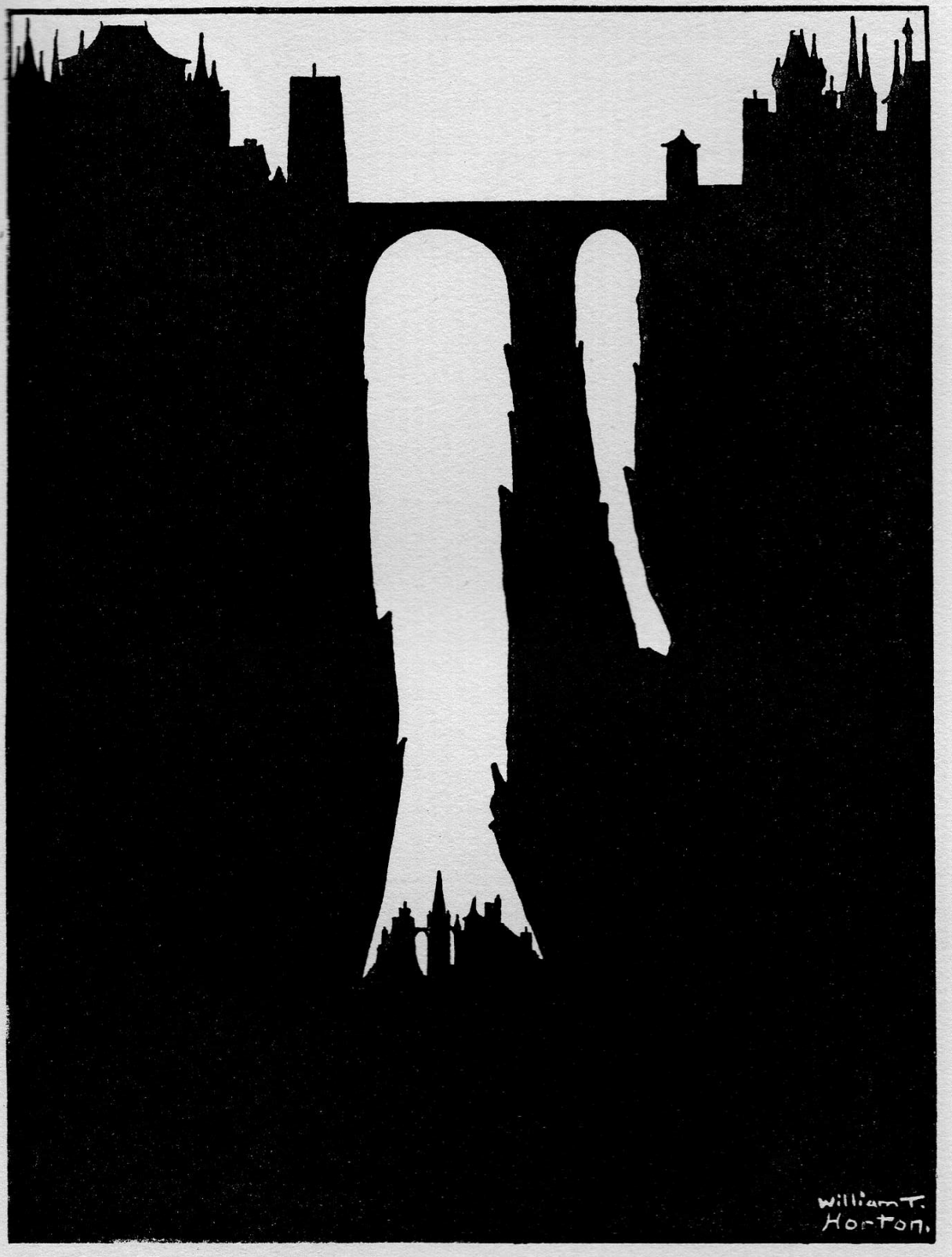
AUG. 15, 1897 STE MARIE DES PINACLES

AUG. 27, 1897 THE PRIORY CHURCH

ST. PIERRE DES PICS

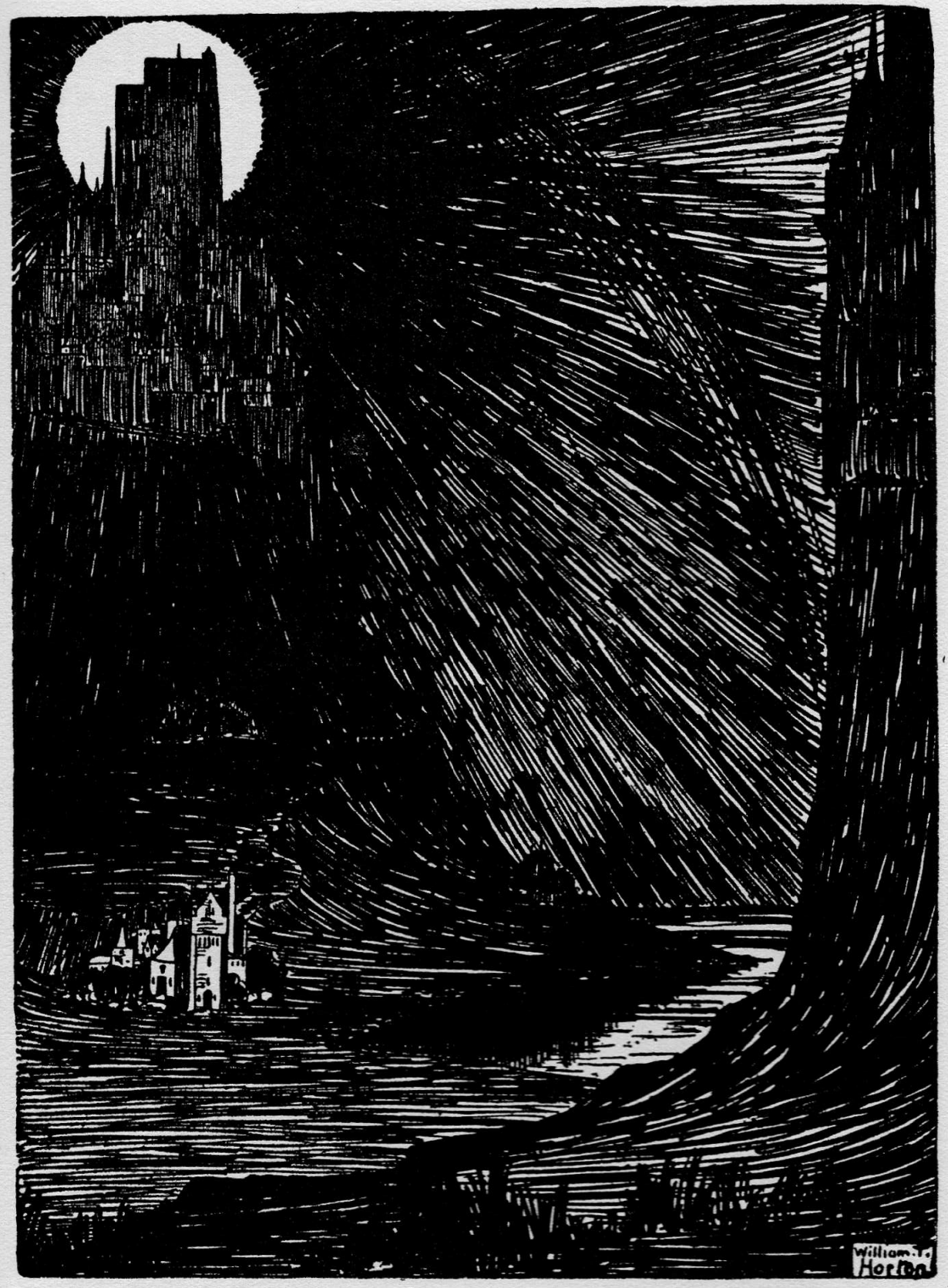


SEP. 3, 1897 PLACE DES VIEUX-TEMPS



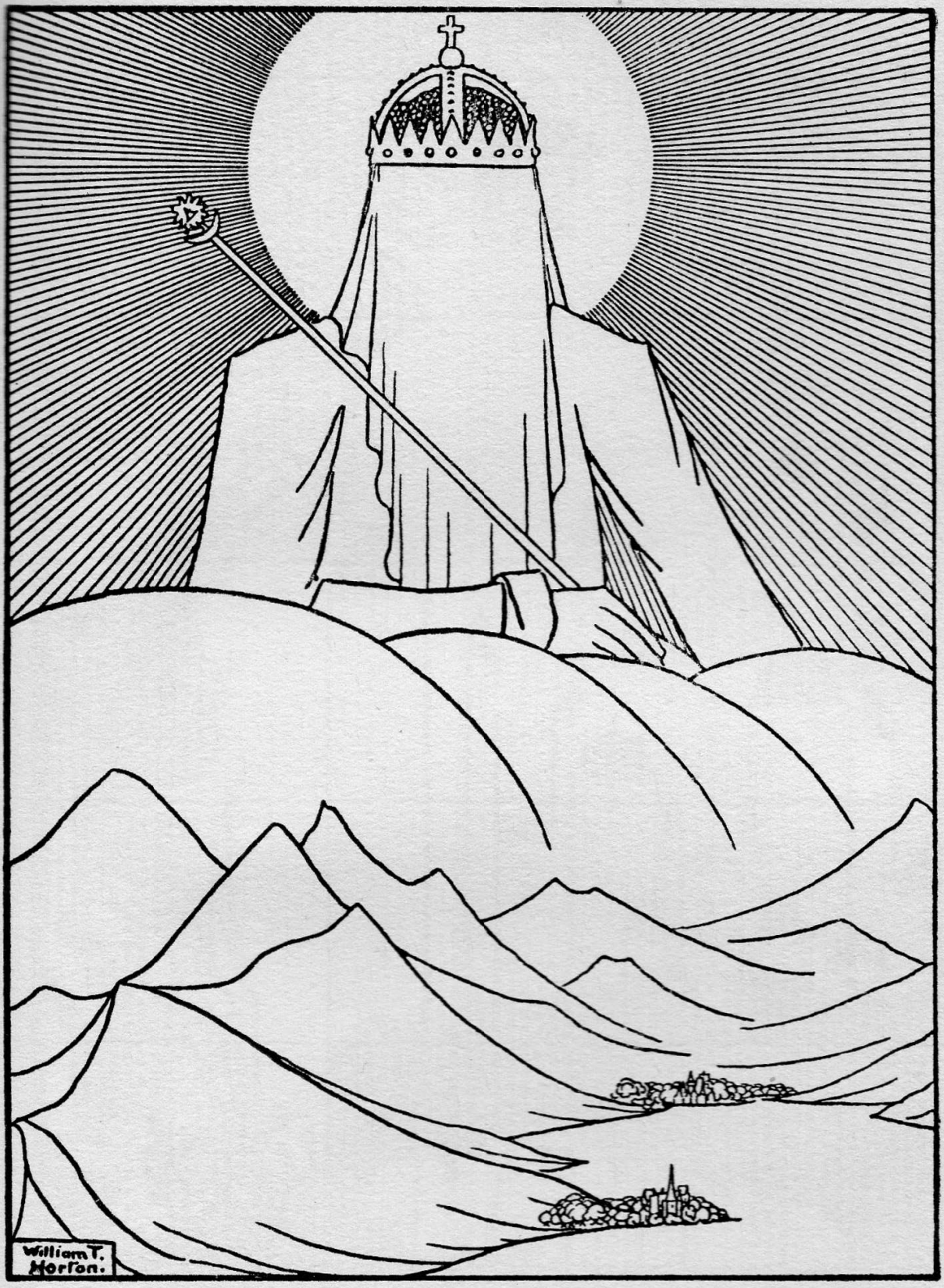
SEP. 23, 1897

LE PONT DU DIABLE

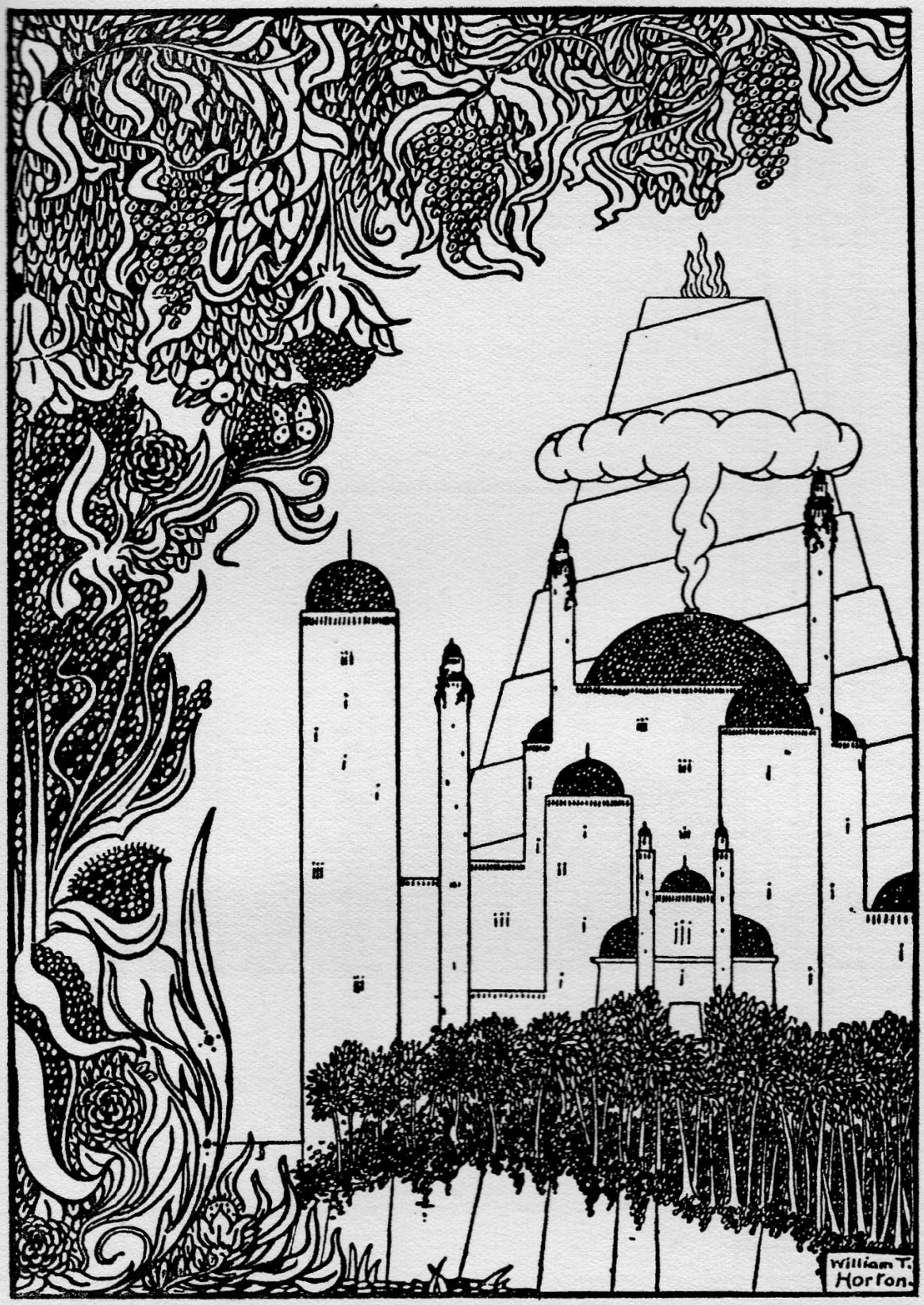


MARCH 9, 1898 THE COMING OF THE LIGHT

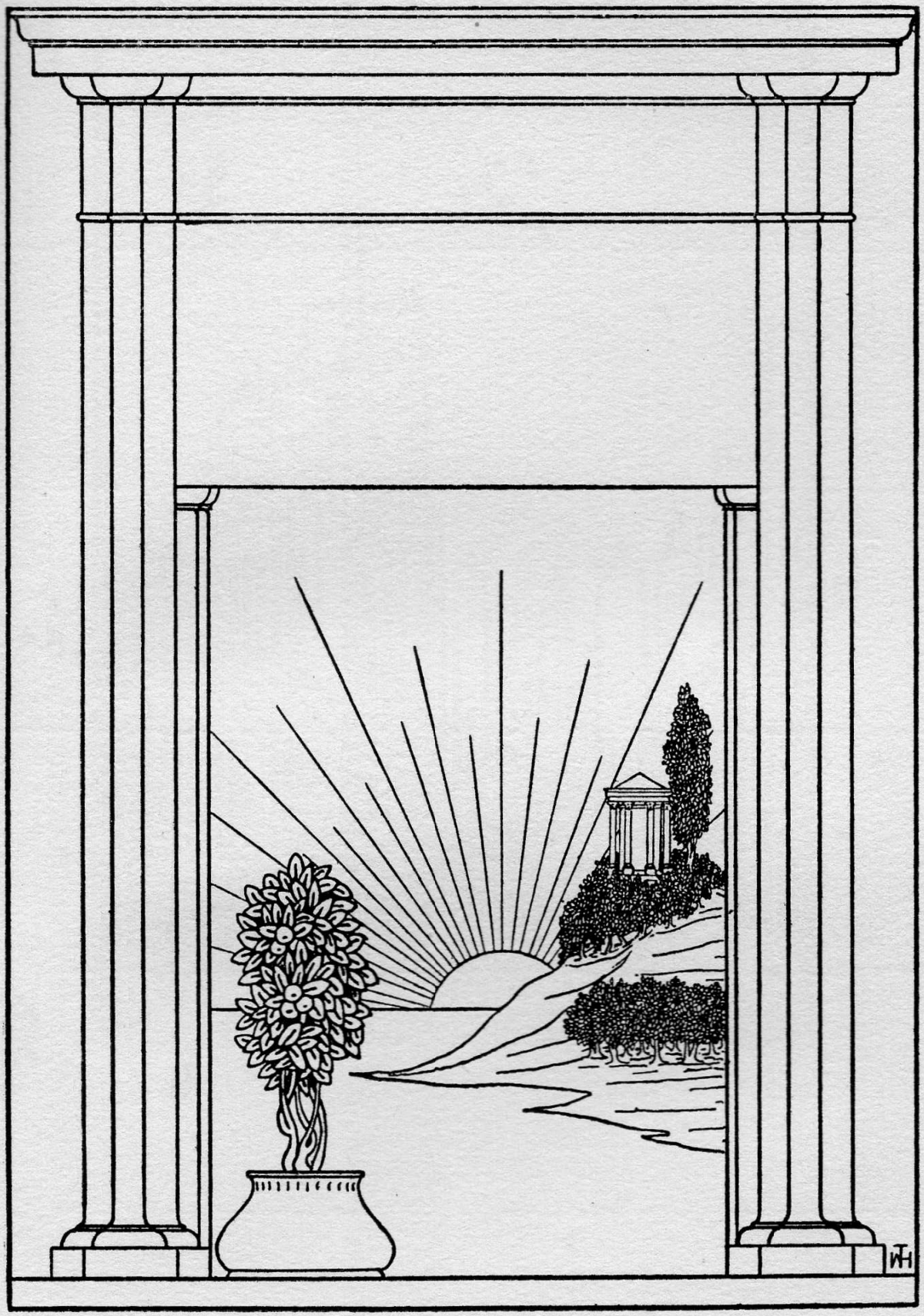
MARCH 16, 1898 THE WORLD'S REWARD



MAY 16, 1898 THE UNKNOWN

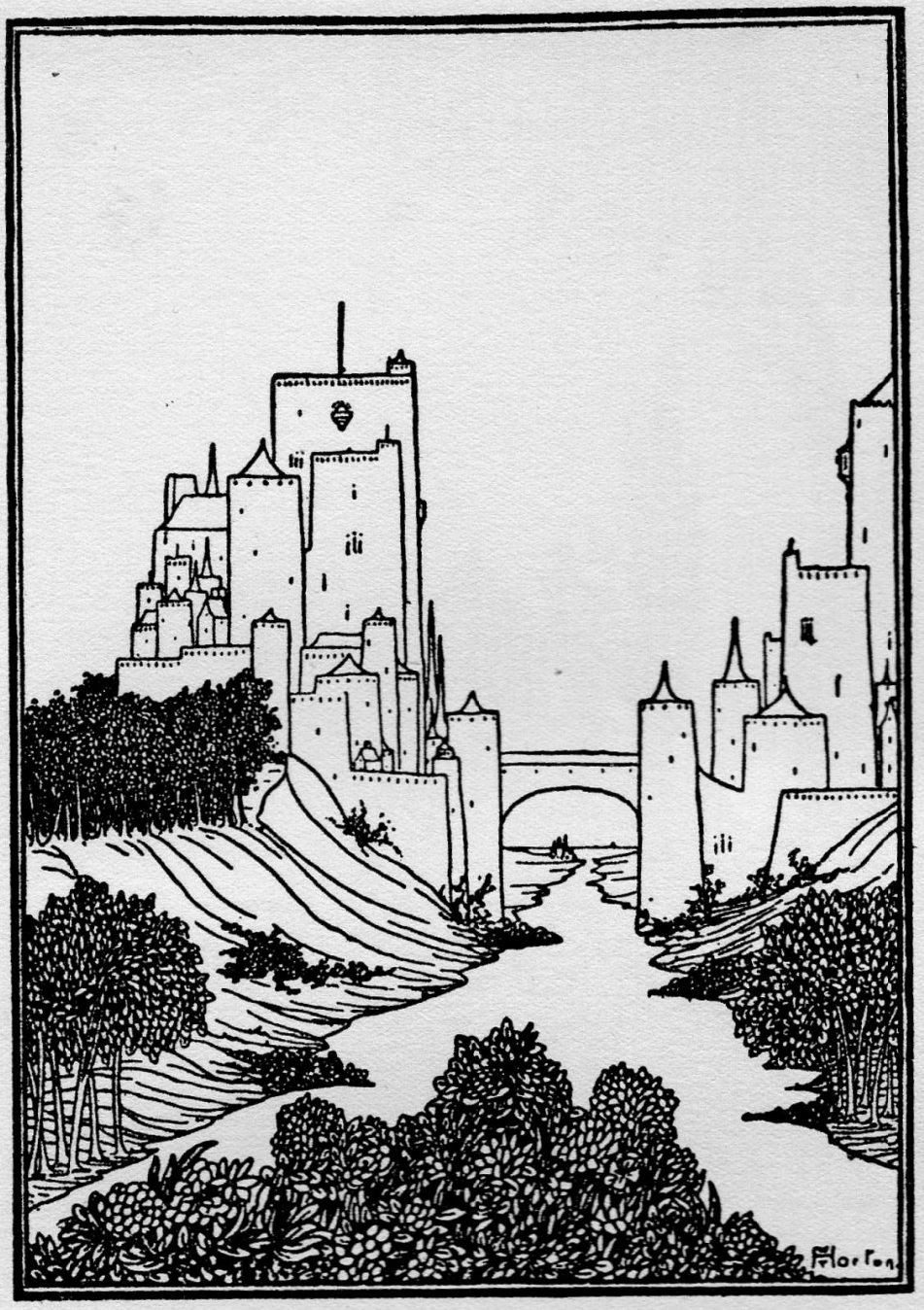


MAY 25, 1898 THE TEMPLE OF THE SUN



JULY 19, 1898

A GLIMPSE



AUG. 15, 1898 CHATEAU DE GARDE

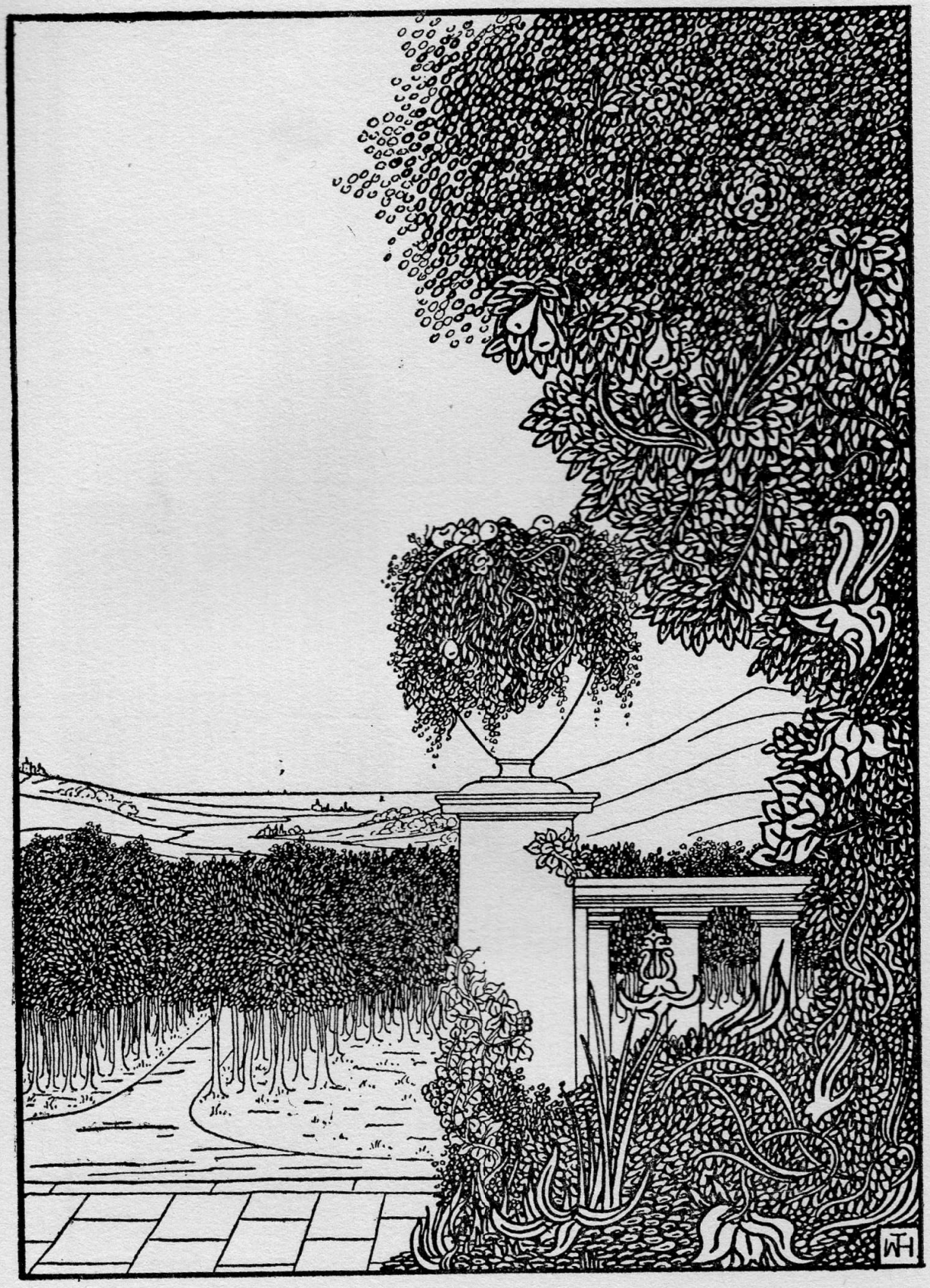
AUG. 23, 1898

THE CHURCH ON THE HILL

PEACE

The Studio

AUG. 25, 1898 THE CHURCH OF THE PINNACLES

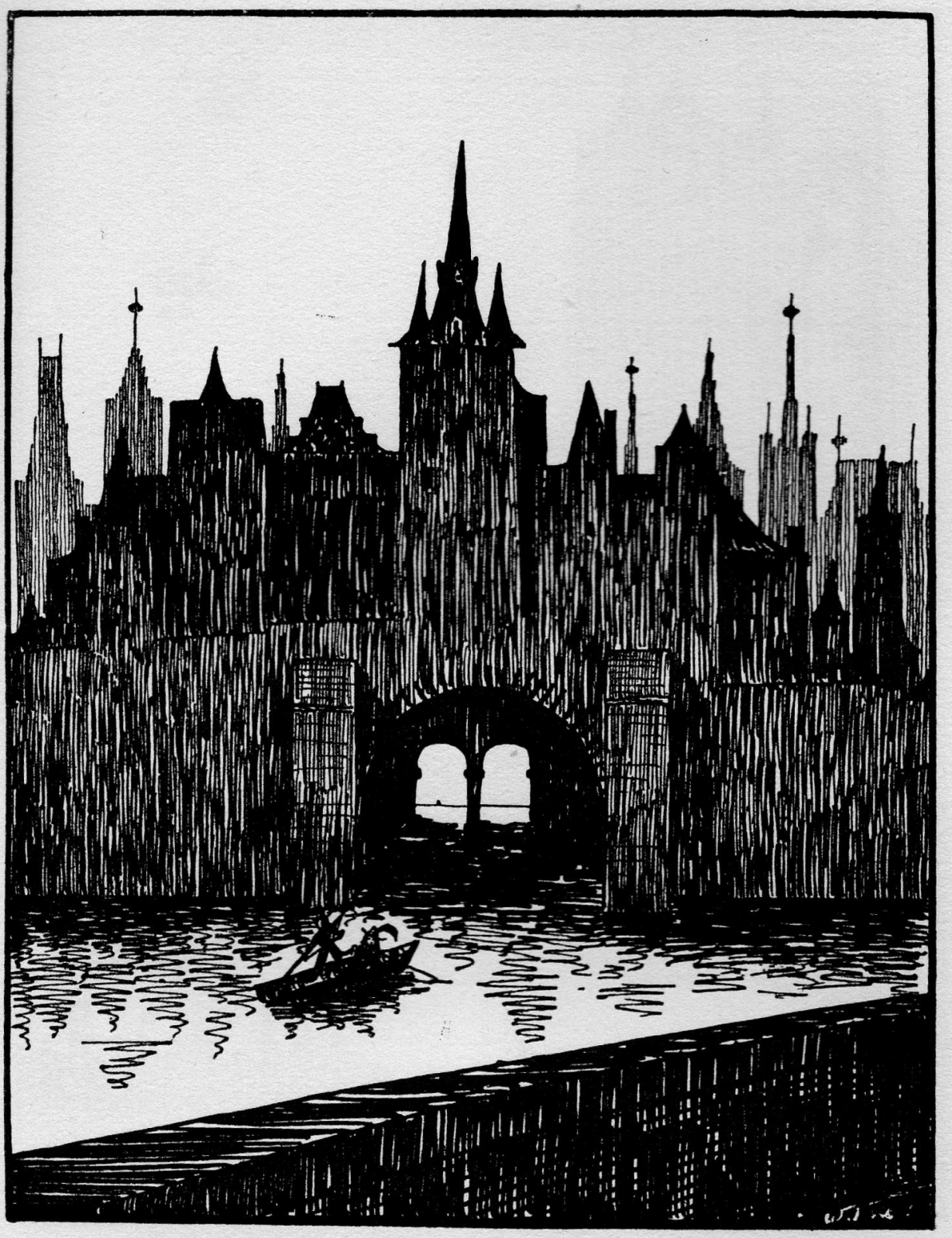


AUG. 31, 1898

FROM THE TERRACE

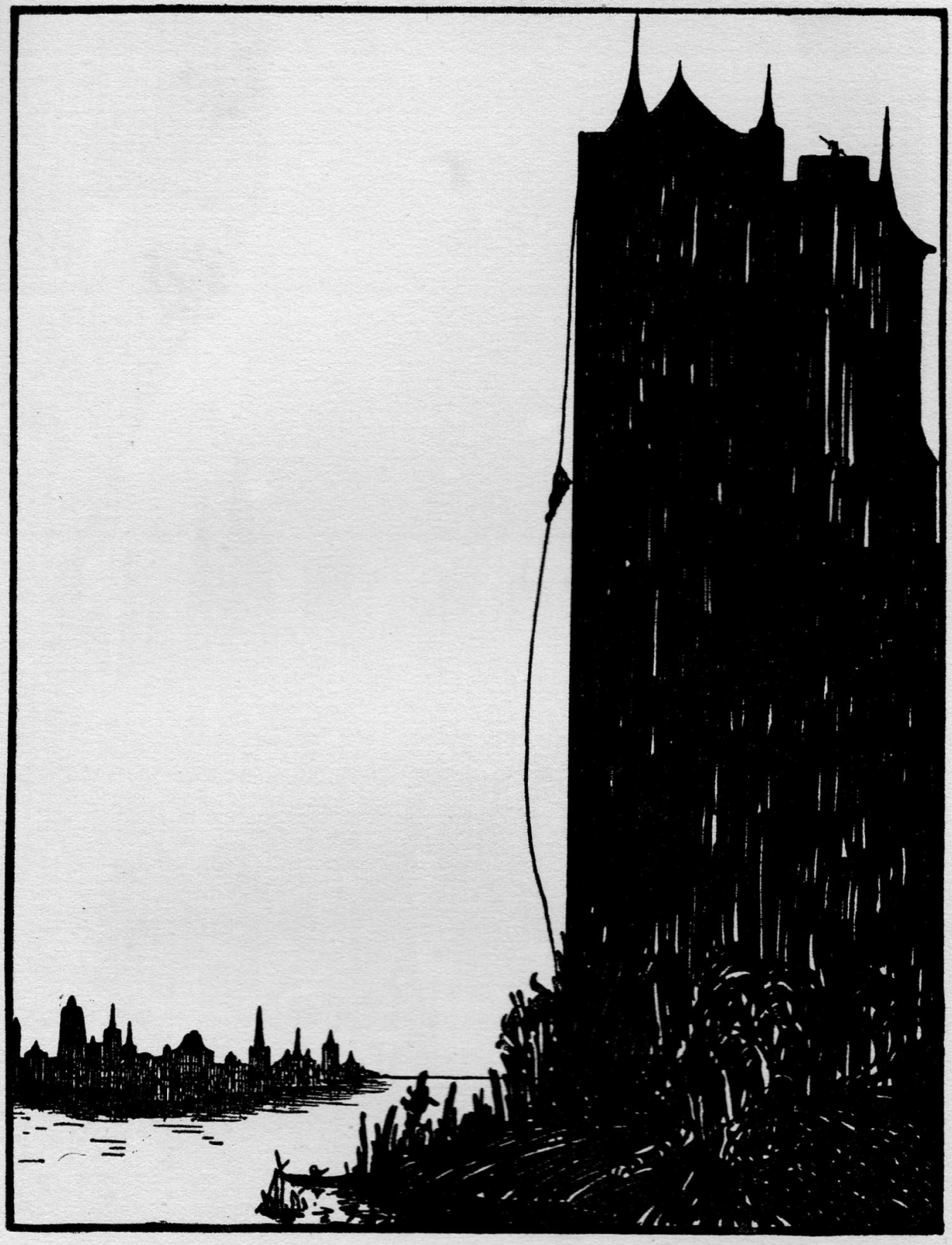
SEP. 27, 1898

THE CREEPER



OCT. 25, 1898

LE TROU DE LA TOUR

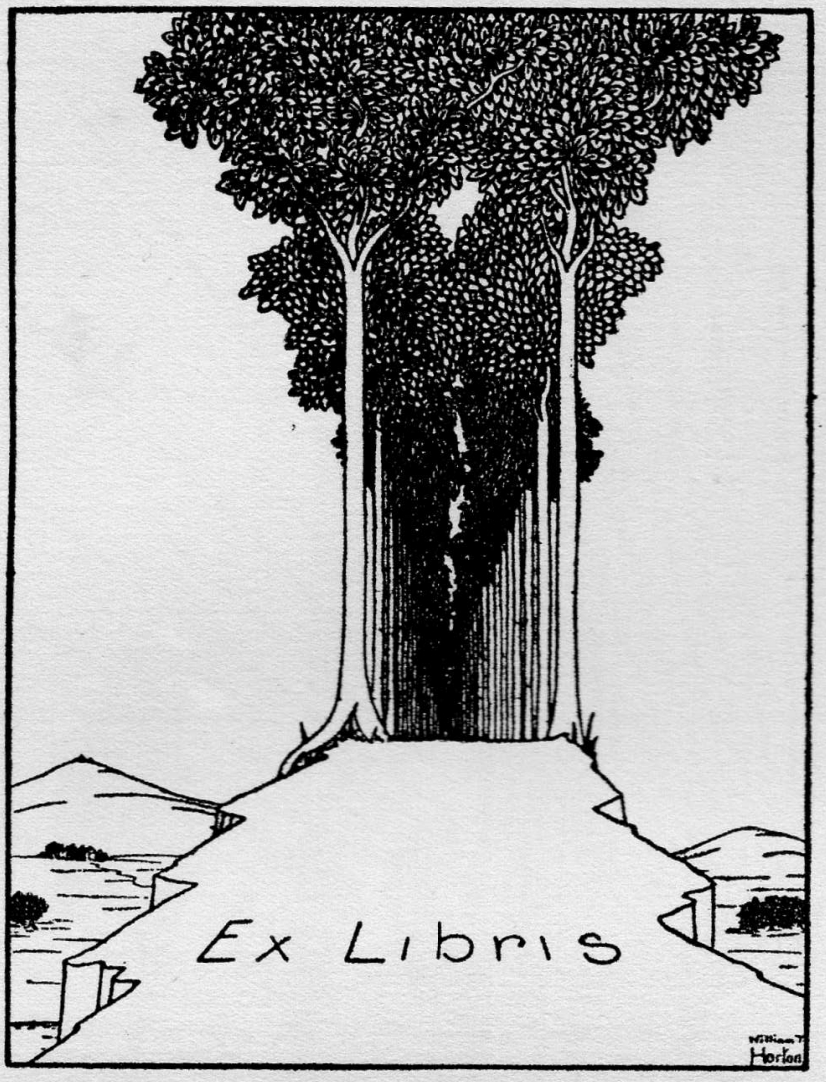


OCT. 24, 1898

THE ESCAPE

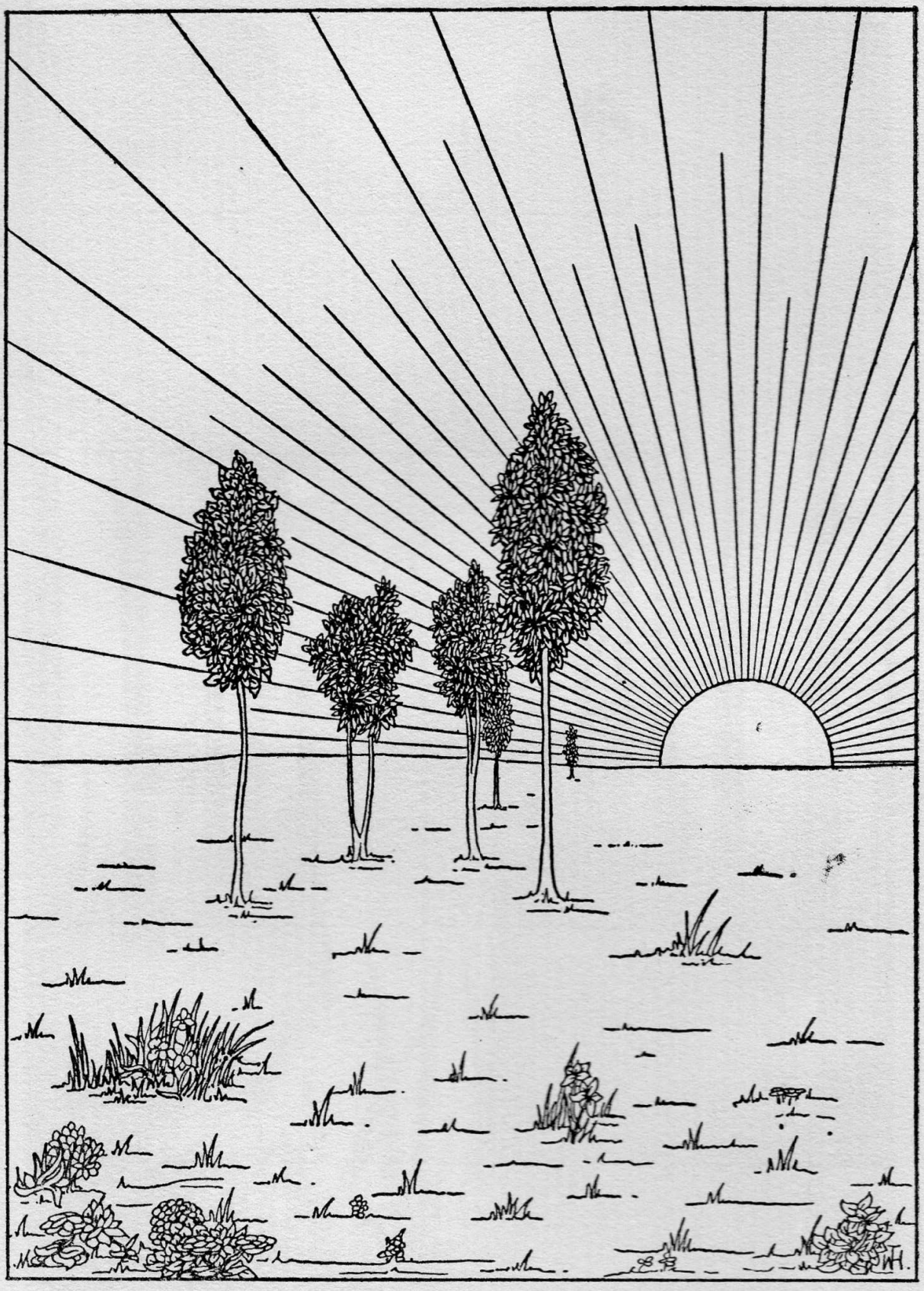
OCT. 25, 1898

PONT DES ARCS



NOV. 10, 1898 THE AVENUE

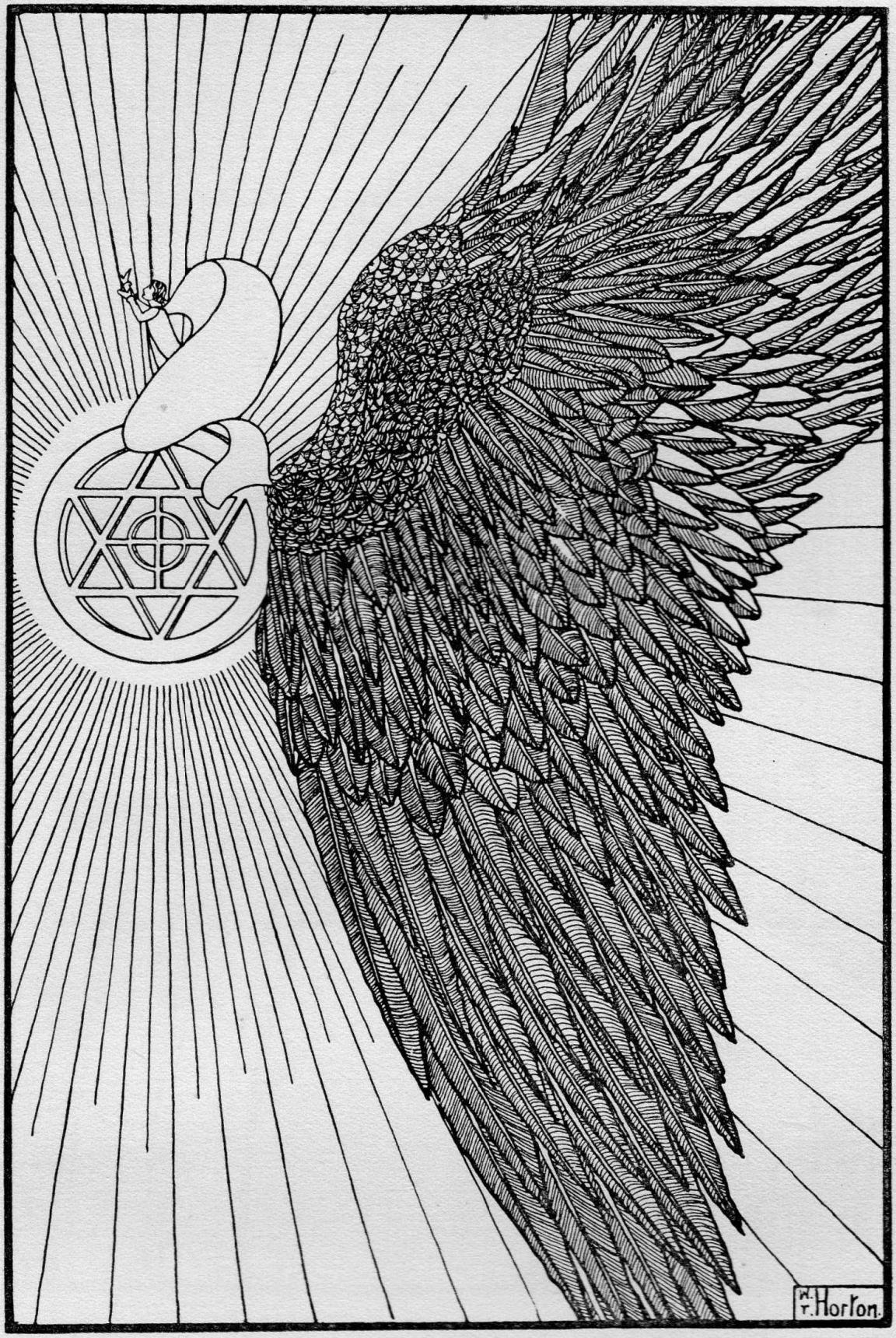
"The Artist", as The Bookplate of a Botanist



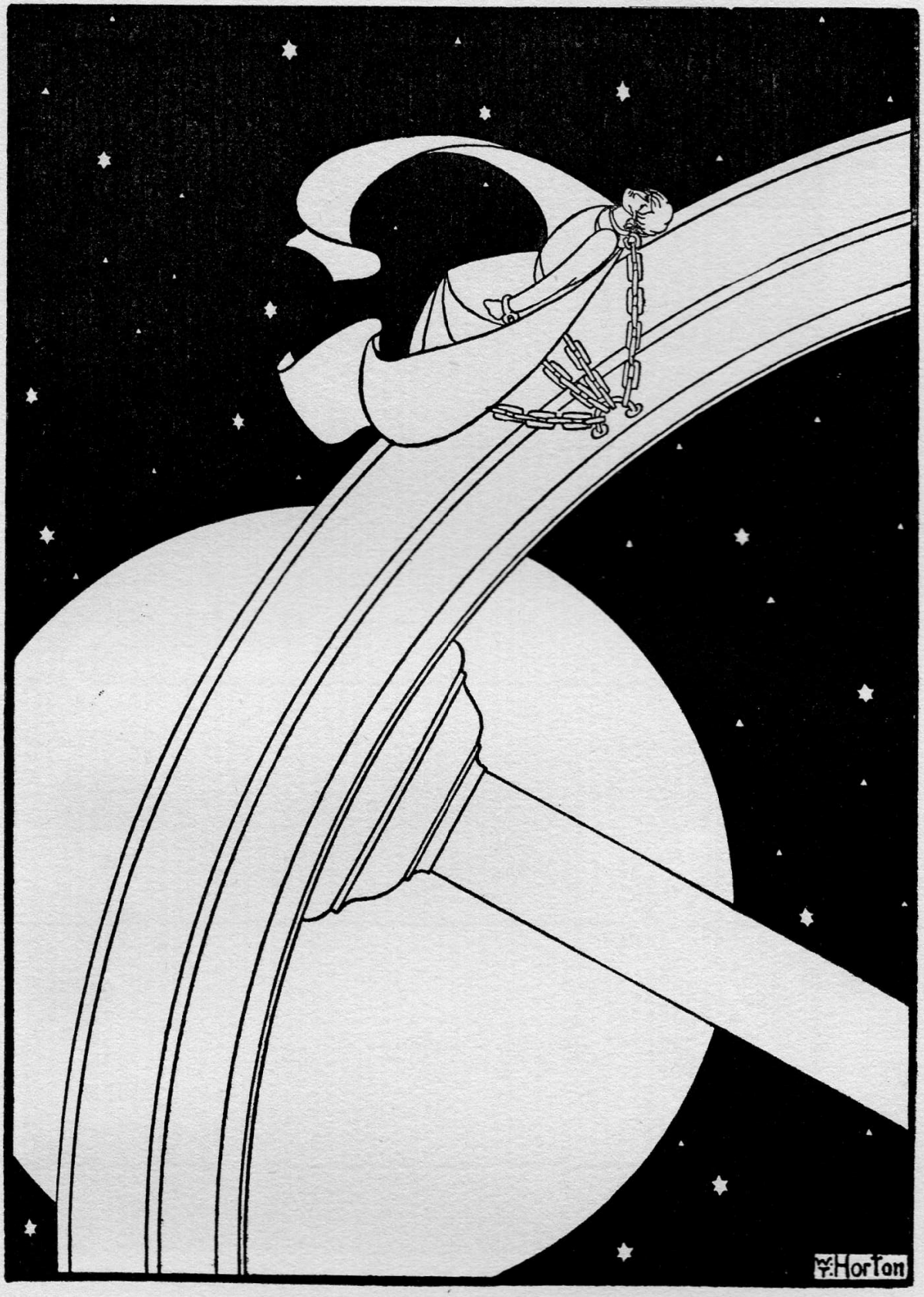
JULY 27, 1900

SUNRISE ON THE PLAIN

JULY 1, 1901 DANTE IN THE WOOD



JULY 23–24, 1901 ON THE WINGS OF THE ETERNAL



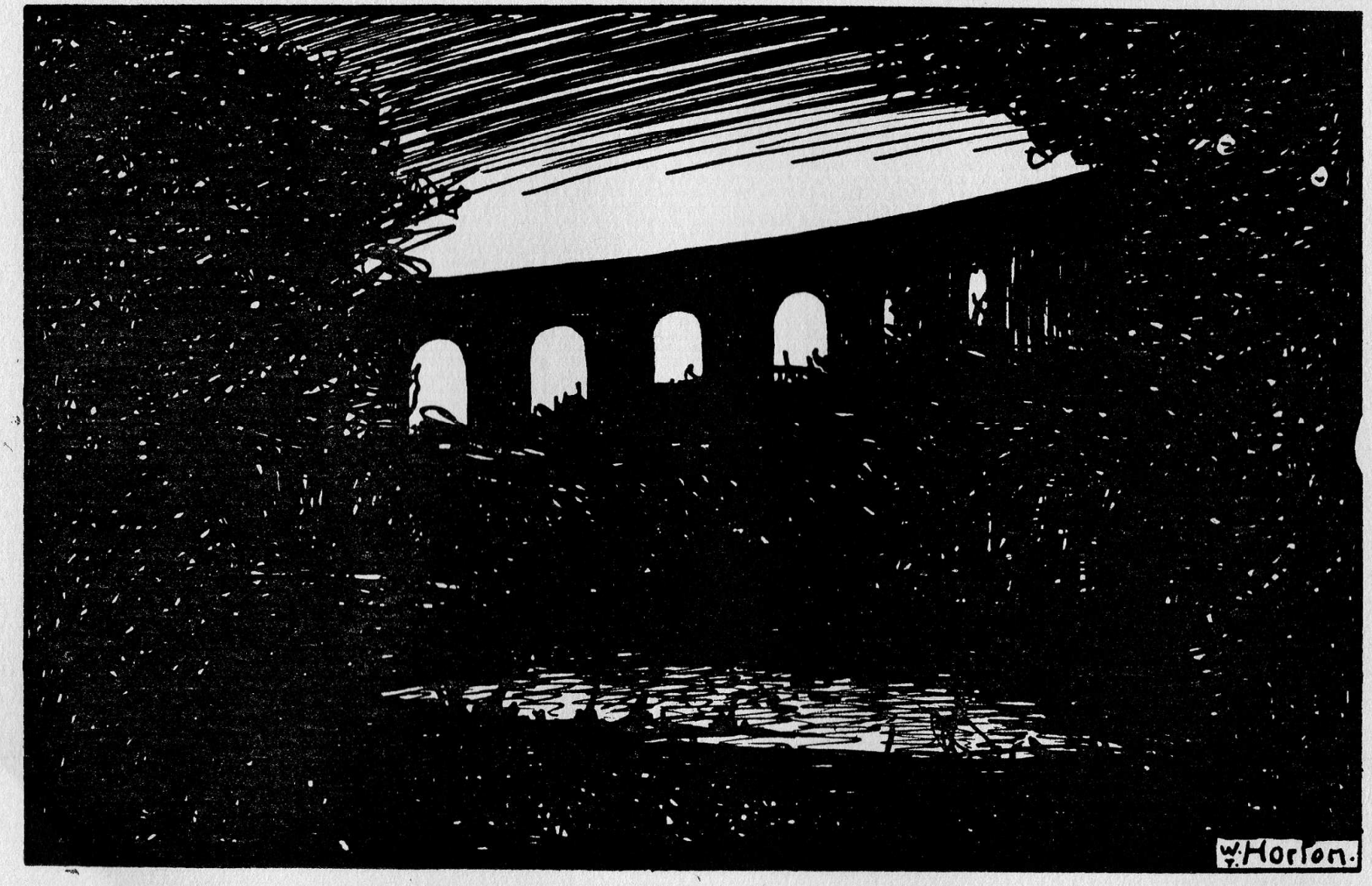
AUG. 3, 1901 SHACKLED ON THE WHEEL OF TIME

APRIL 28, 1903

SKAGERACK

SEP. 18, 1903 THE SIDE CHAPEL

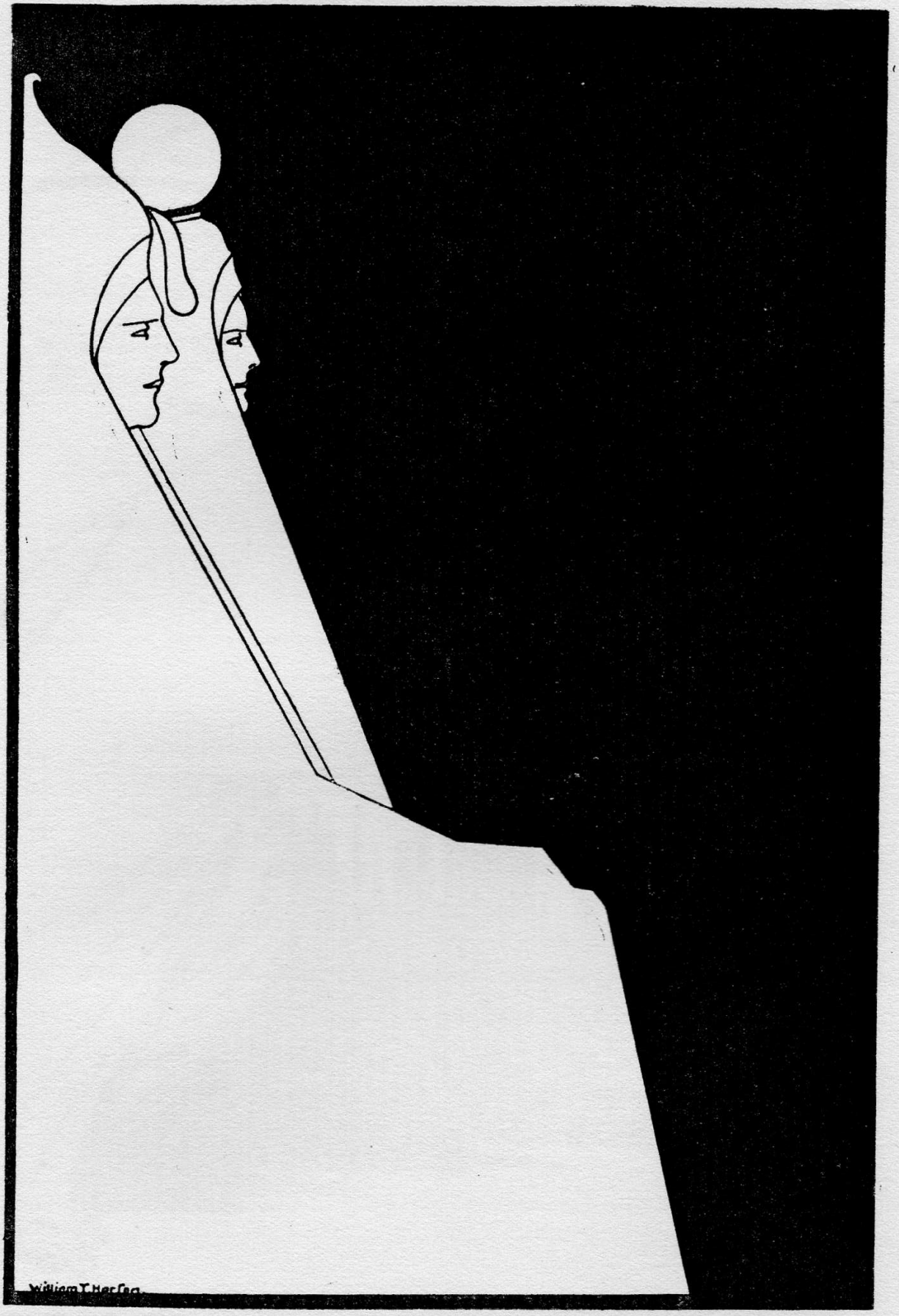
JULY 2, 1904 ON THE BANKS OF THE OBER


W. Horton.

JULY 15, 1905

MANY ROADS

W. Horton

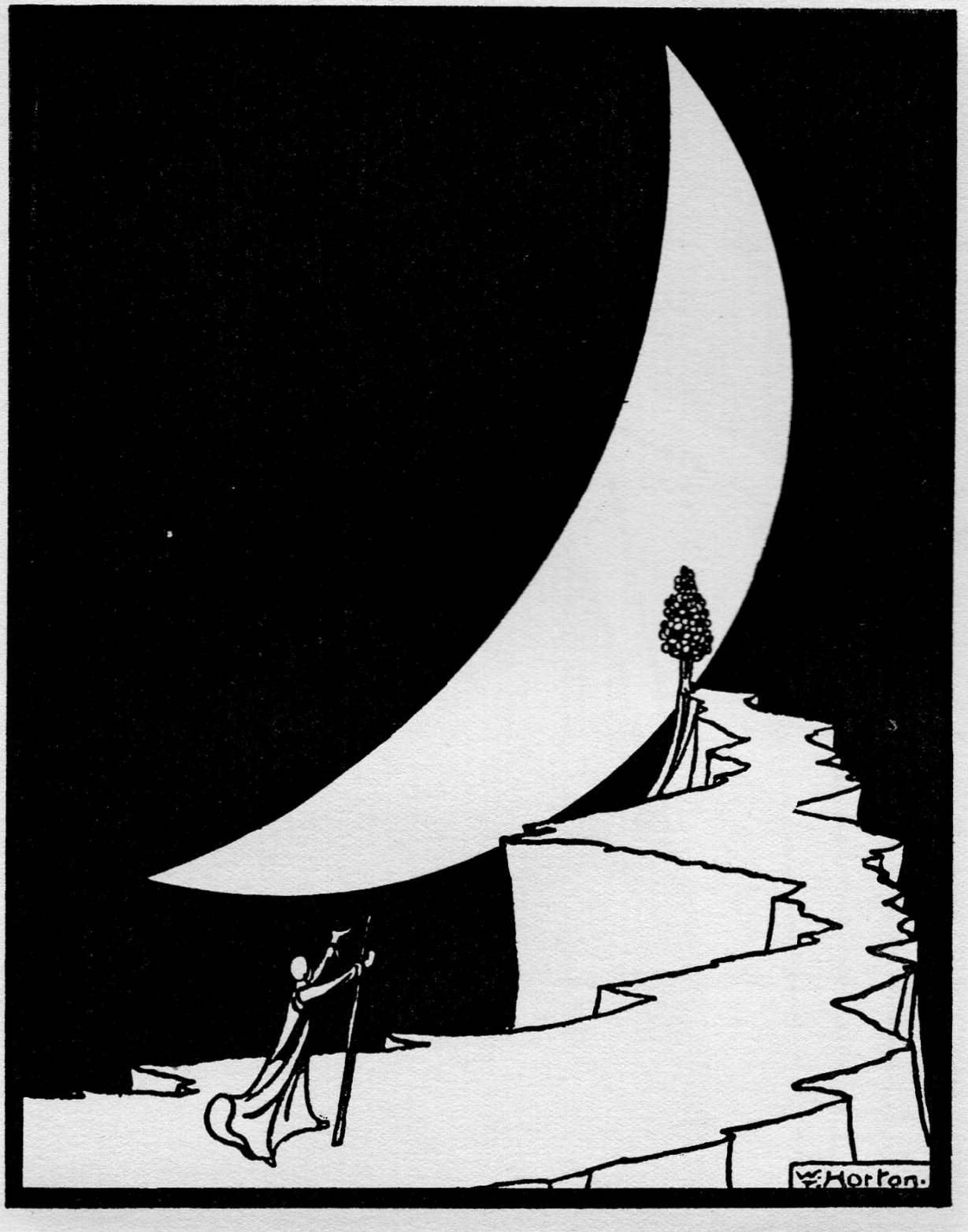


The Way of a Soul

ISIS–OSIRIS, LO ! ON THY THRONE
TWO-IN-ONE, APART, ALONE,
BREATHE ON US OF THY MIGHT ;
RULER OF LOVE AND LIGHT
ISIS–OSIRIS ON THY GOLDEN THRONE
TWO-IN-ONE, APART, ALONE

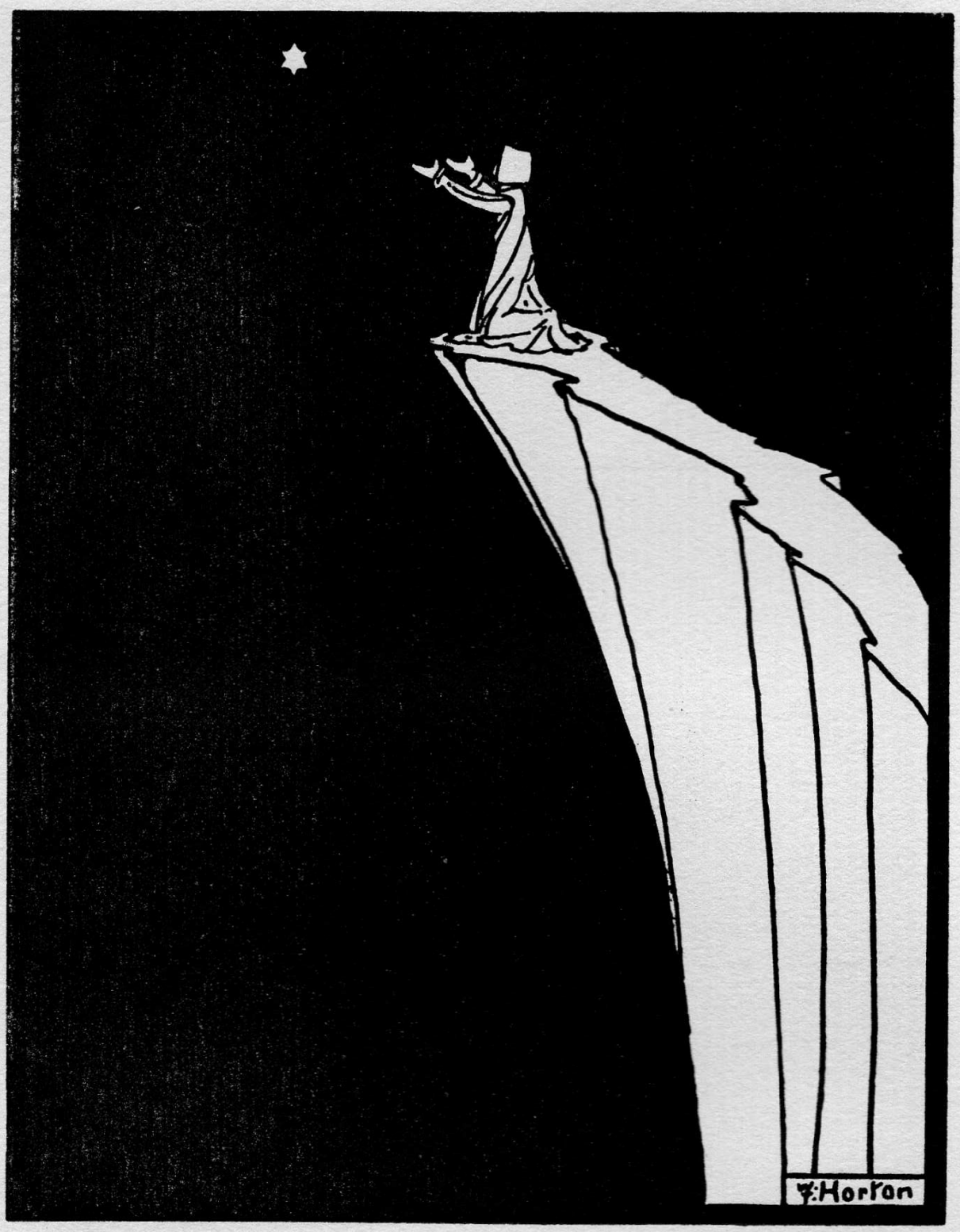
The Way of a Soul
AUG. 26, 1905

I, THE CONCEALED, DESCEND AND MOVE
THE HEARTS OF MEN IN WAYS UNKNOWN,
THEIR STRENGTH OF SOUL I STERNLY PROVE,
UNTIL FULL STATURED THEY HAVE GROWN.



The Way of a Soul
AUG. 20, 1906

I KNOW THAT OVER THERE,
BEHIND THE CRESCENT MOON,
THERE WAITS FOR ME, SOMEWHERE,
ONE I SHALL MEET FULL SOON.

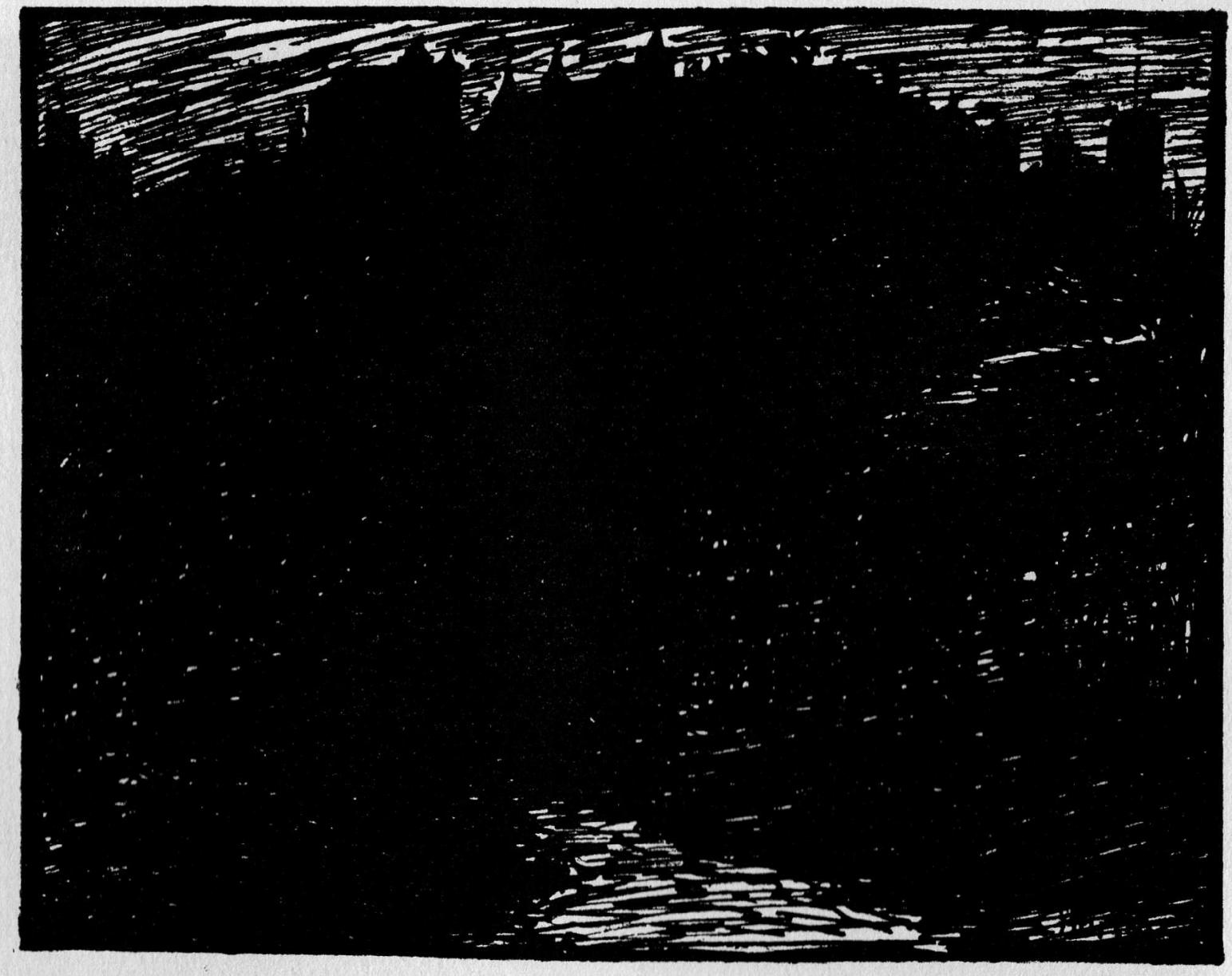


The Way of a Soul
DEC. 4, 1905

UPON THE UTMOST POINT OF EARTH
THE SOUL IN LONELINESS DOTH CRY
AND, FROM THE POWER THAT GAVE IT BIRTH
DEMANDS THE WHEREFORE AND THE WHY.

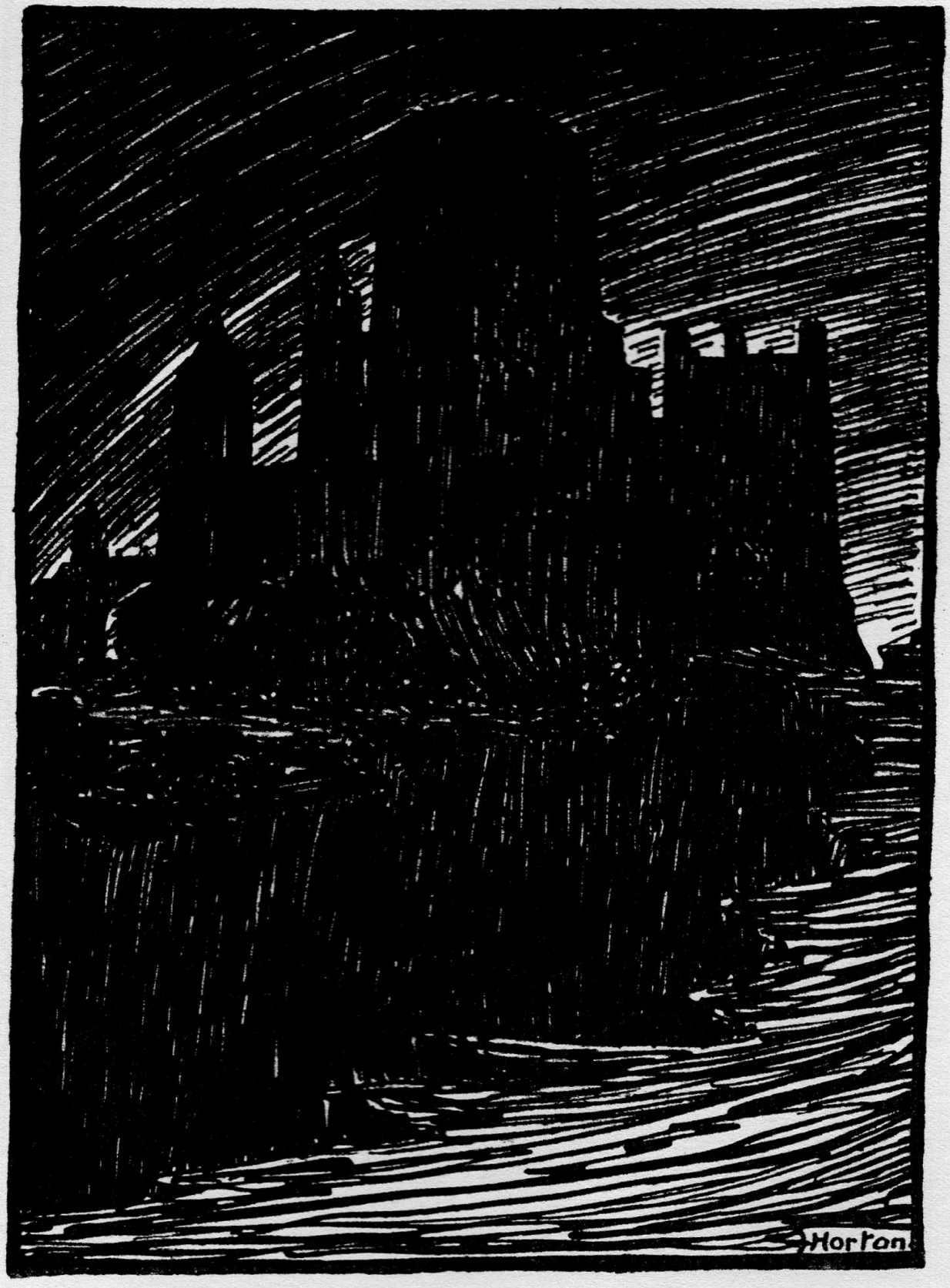
MARCH 2, 1908

L'ETANG DE CORTEMBERT



JUNE 5, 1909

ST. MAUR-DE-LA-MONTAGNE



CHATEAU-AUDACE

CHATEAU LA HAUT

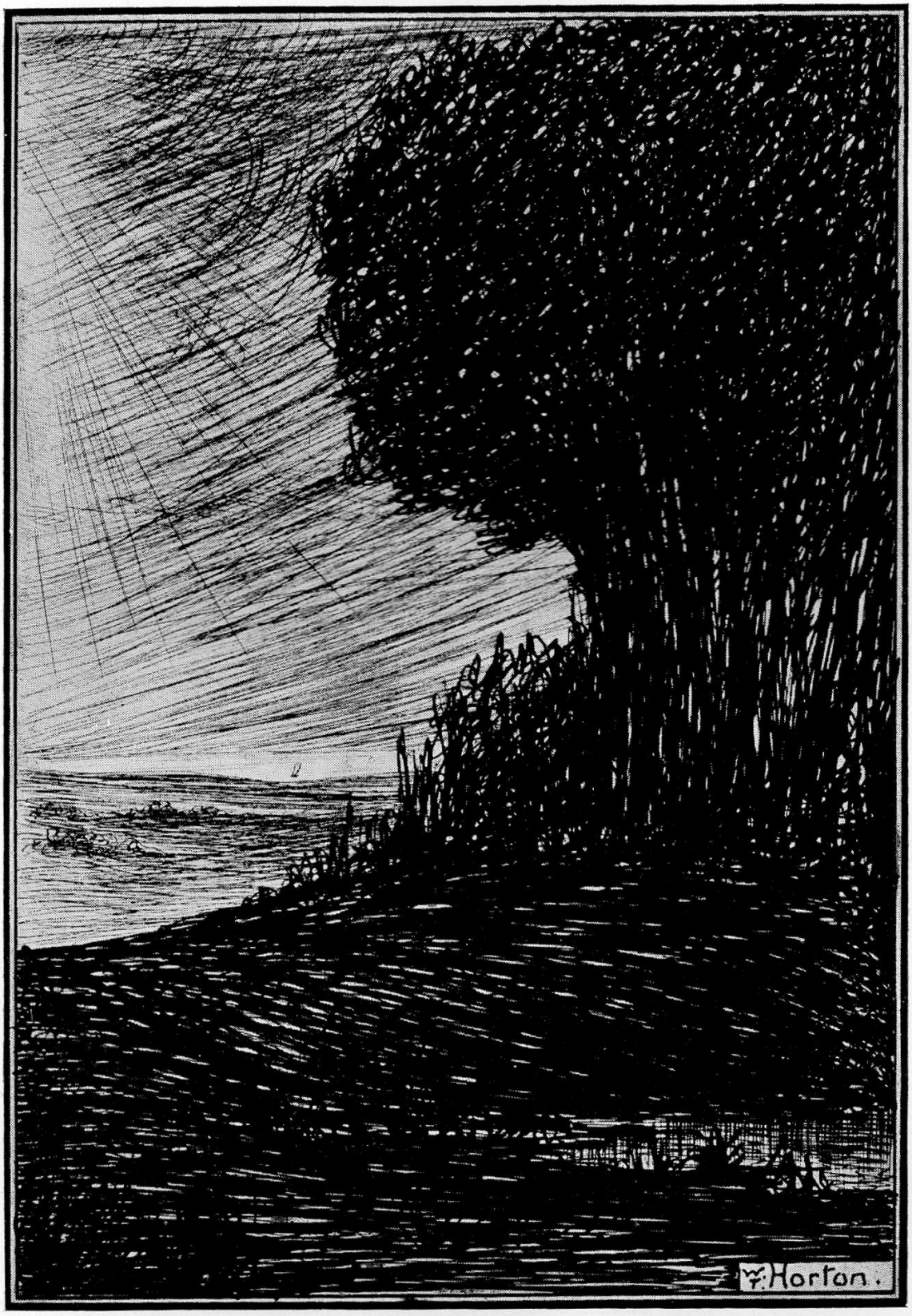
JUNE 6, 1909

DEC. 16, 1904

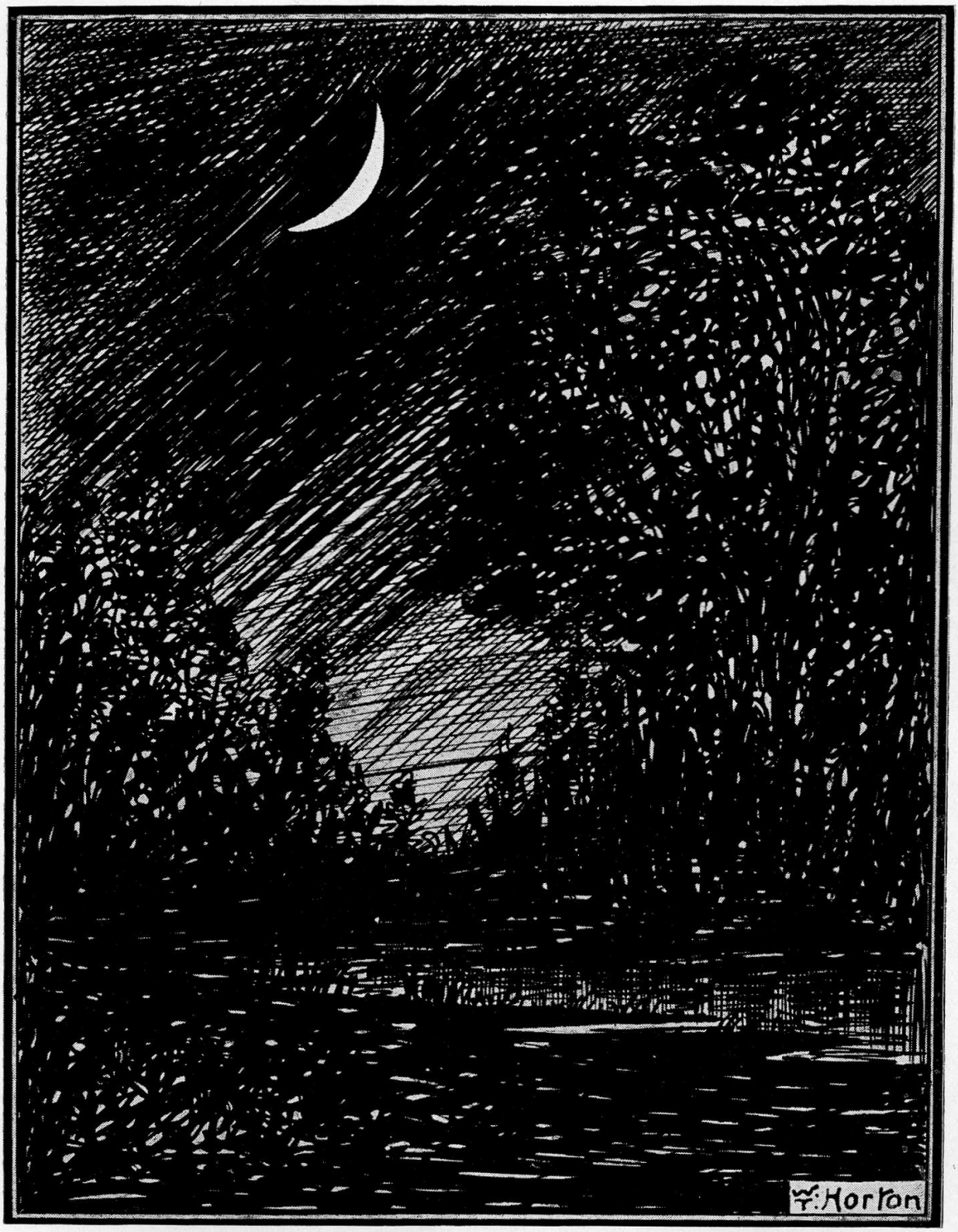
THE FAERY POOL

THE POOL IN THE VALLEY

SEP. 20, 1905 THE WINDMILL



SEP. 23, 1905 THE GLEAM OF SUNSHINE

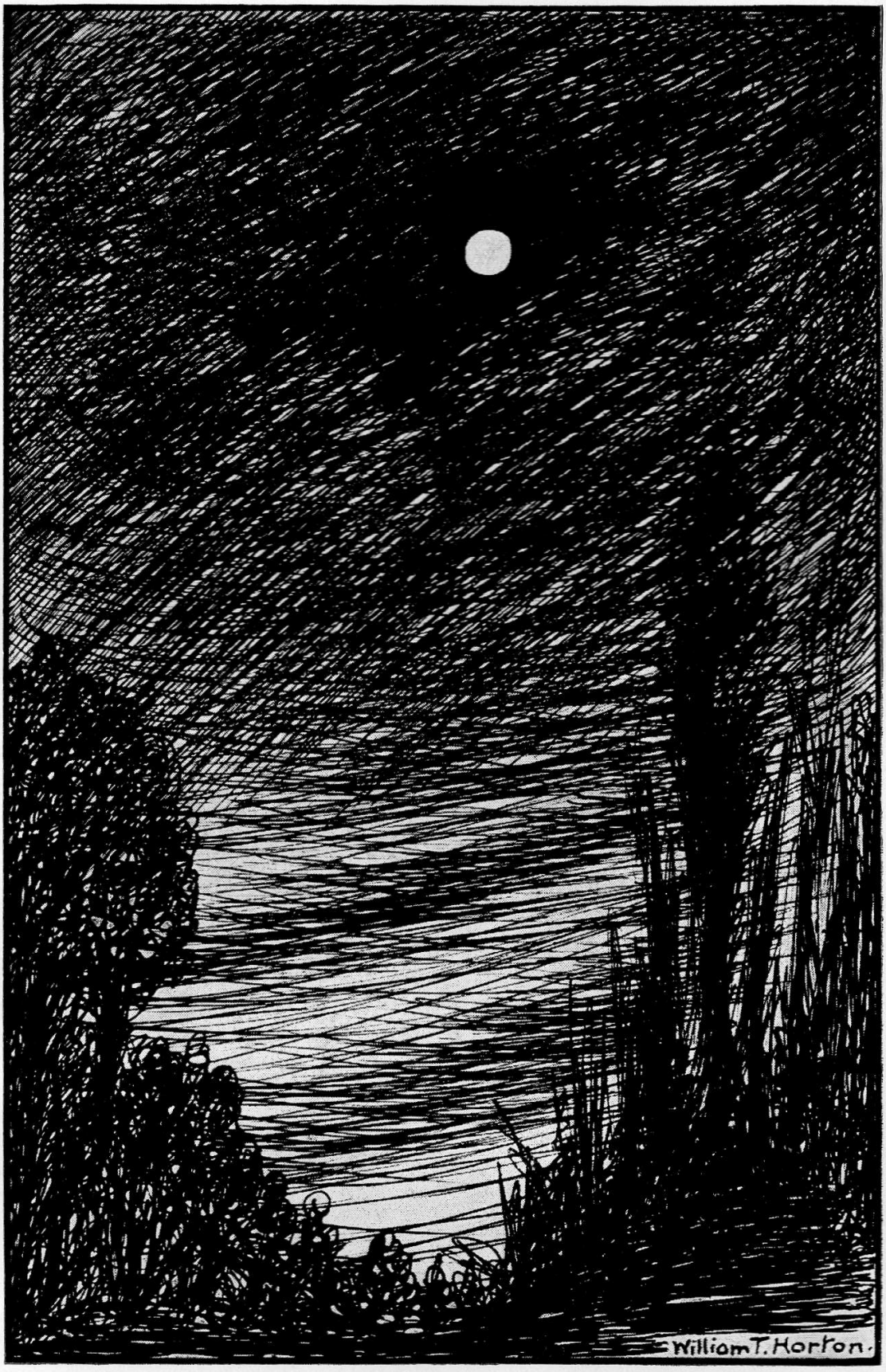


DEC. 7, 1905

NEAR PILLNITZ

DEC. 16, 1904 THE VILLAGE CHURCH

DEC. 18, 1905 THE ROLLING MIST



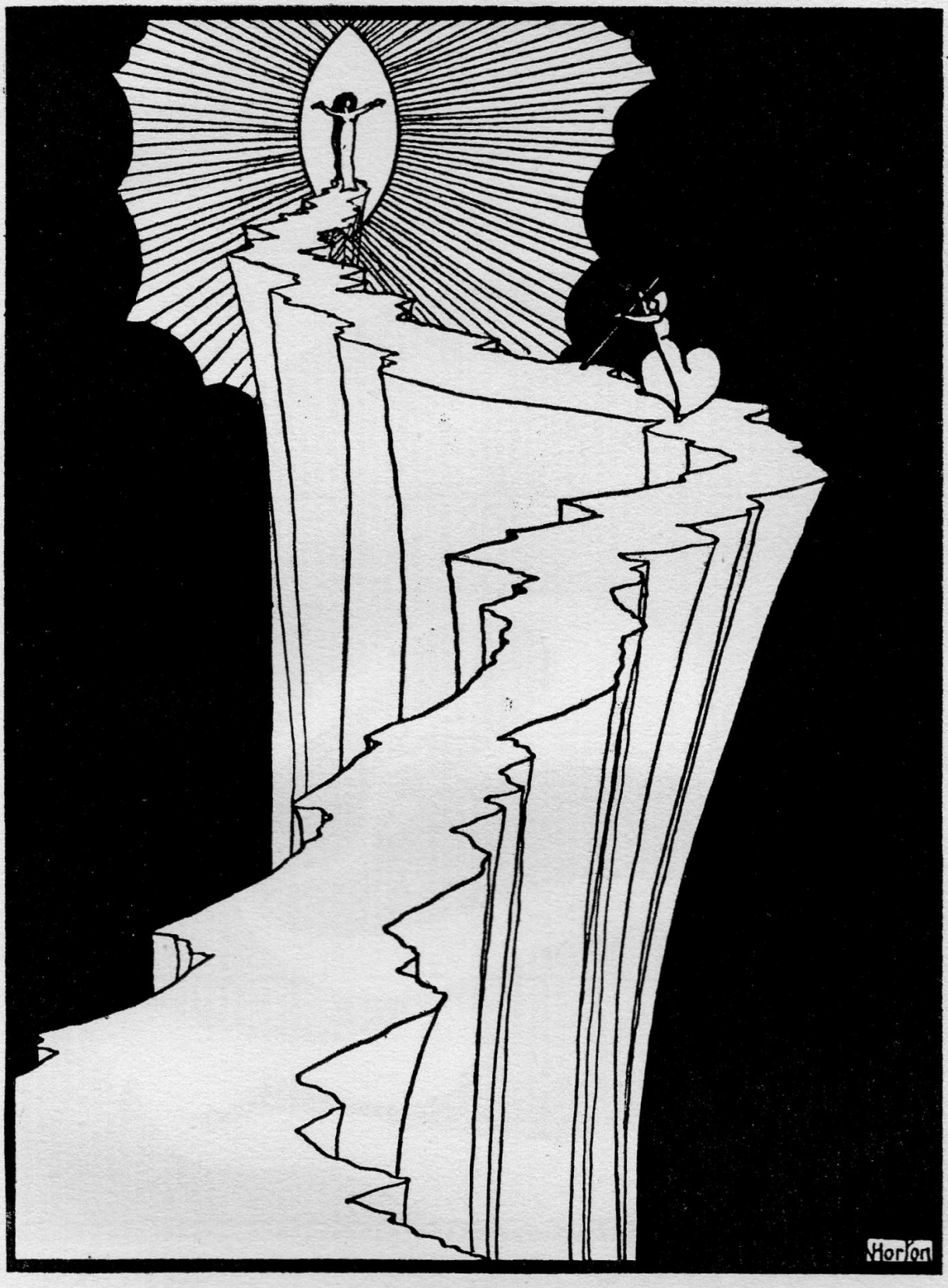
OCT. 21, 1907. THE MOON IS HIGH

MAY 30, 1909

THE WATER MEADOW

MAY 30, 1909

SUNRISE



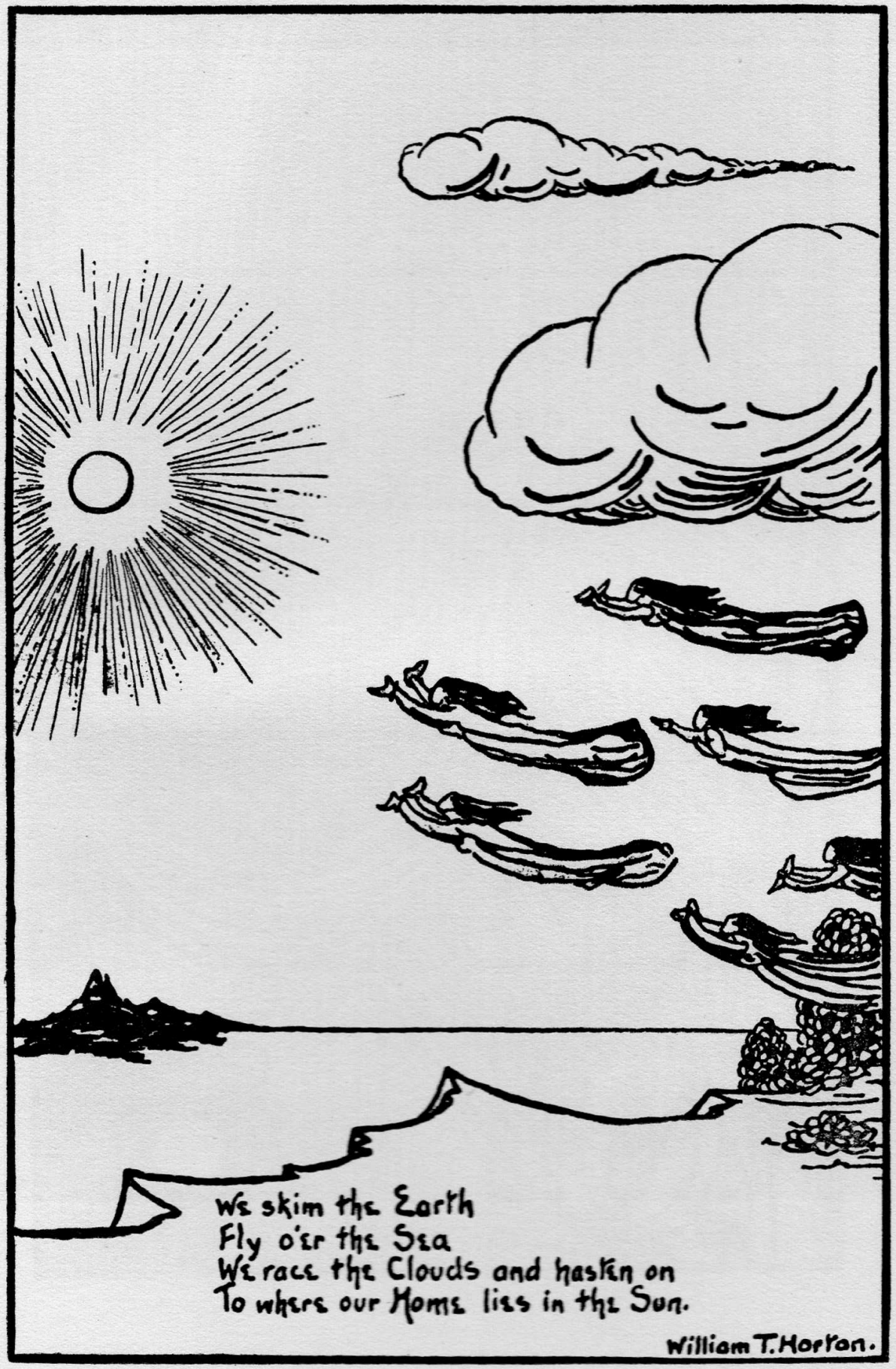
The Way of a Soul
MAY 31, 1910

I KNEW FULL WELL WHEN TO THE EARTH
I CAME, AND PASSED THE GATES OF BIRTH,
THAT I SHOULD FIND, 'MID RIGHT AND WRONG
THE NARROW WAY BOTH STEEP AND LONG
WHICH LED TO WHERE MY GUIDING STAR
SHONE RADIANT ON ME FROM AFAR
GREAT RAYS OF LIGHT WHICH, DRAWING NEAR,
GREW STRONGER, BRIGHTER AND MORE CLEAR.

The Way of a Soul
JUNE 3, 1910

THE VERY WOE, THAT WOULD ENSHROUD
MY BEING WITH ITS SABLE CLOUD,
RAISES ME UP, AS ON A CLOUD,
AND BEARS ME HIGH ABOVE EARTH'S TOIL.

NOV. 7, 1906 THE CHAPEL IN THE WOOD



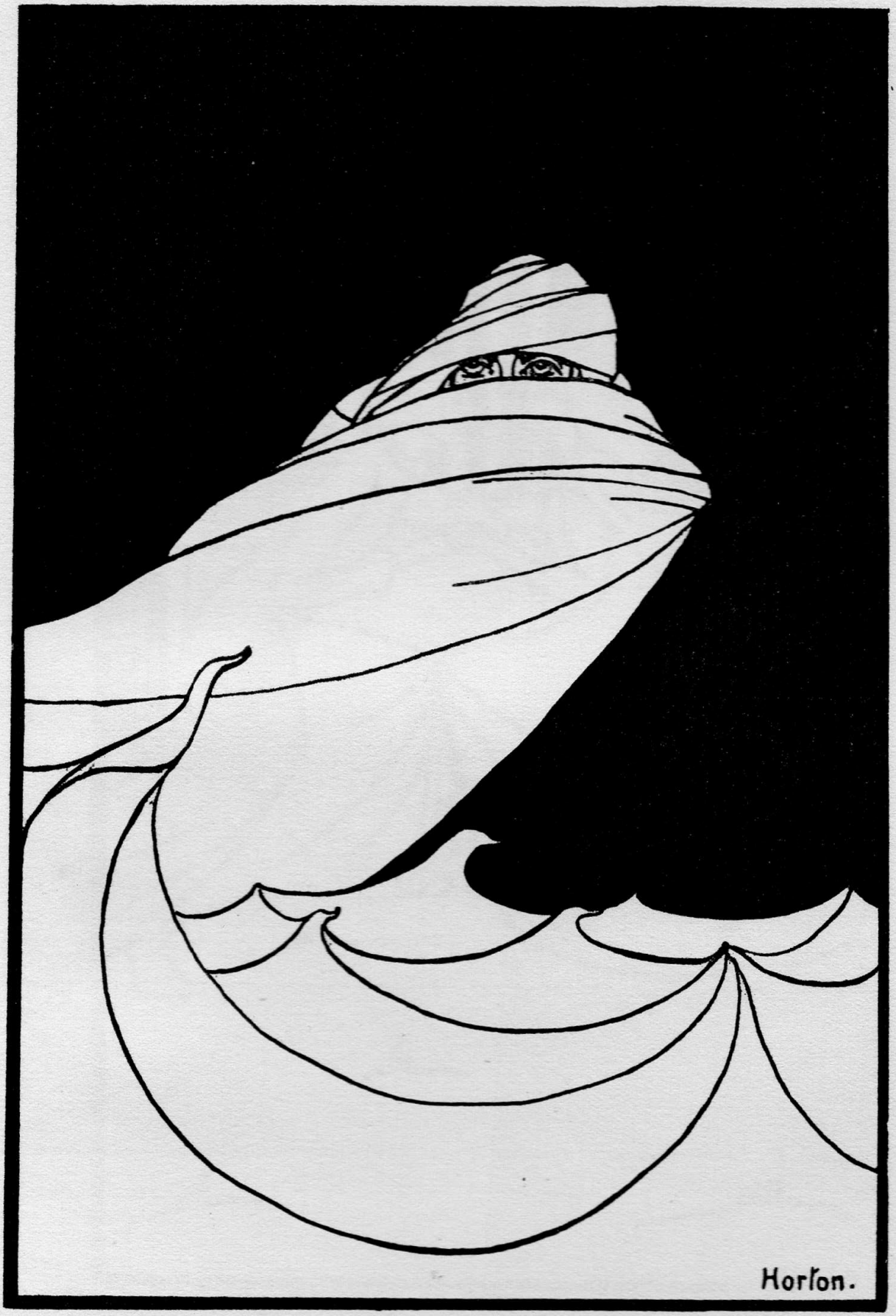
OCT. 1, 1907 WE SKIM THE EARTH

OCT. 2, 1907

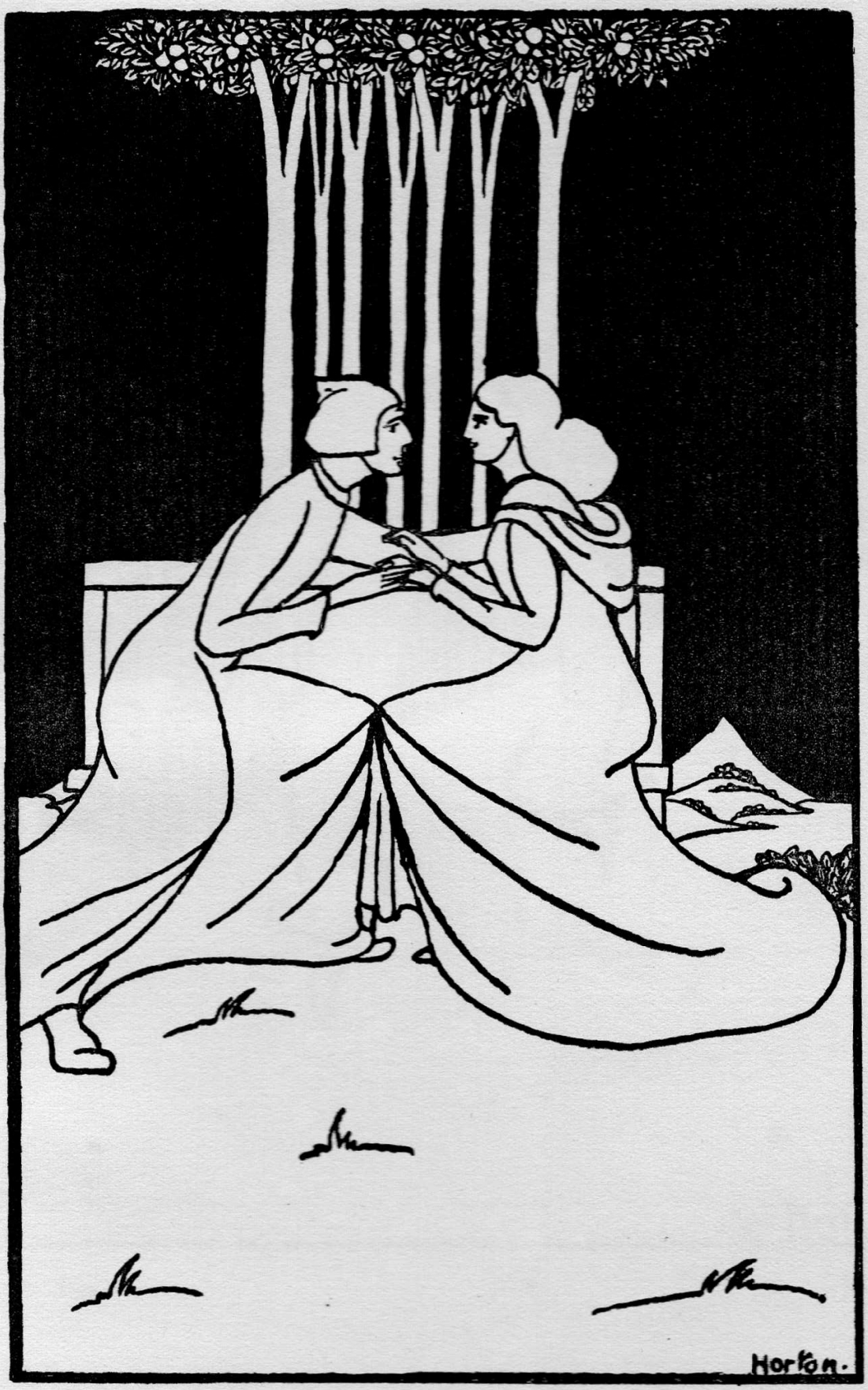
ELEMENTAL

OCT. 17, 1907 THE TEMPLE OF ZEUS

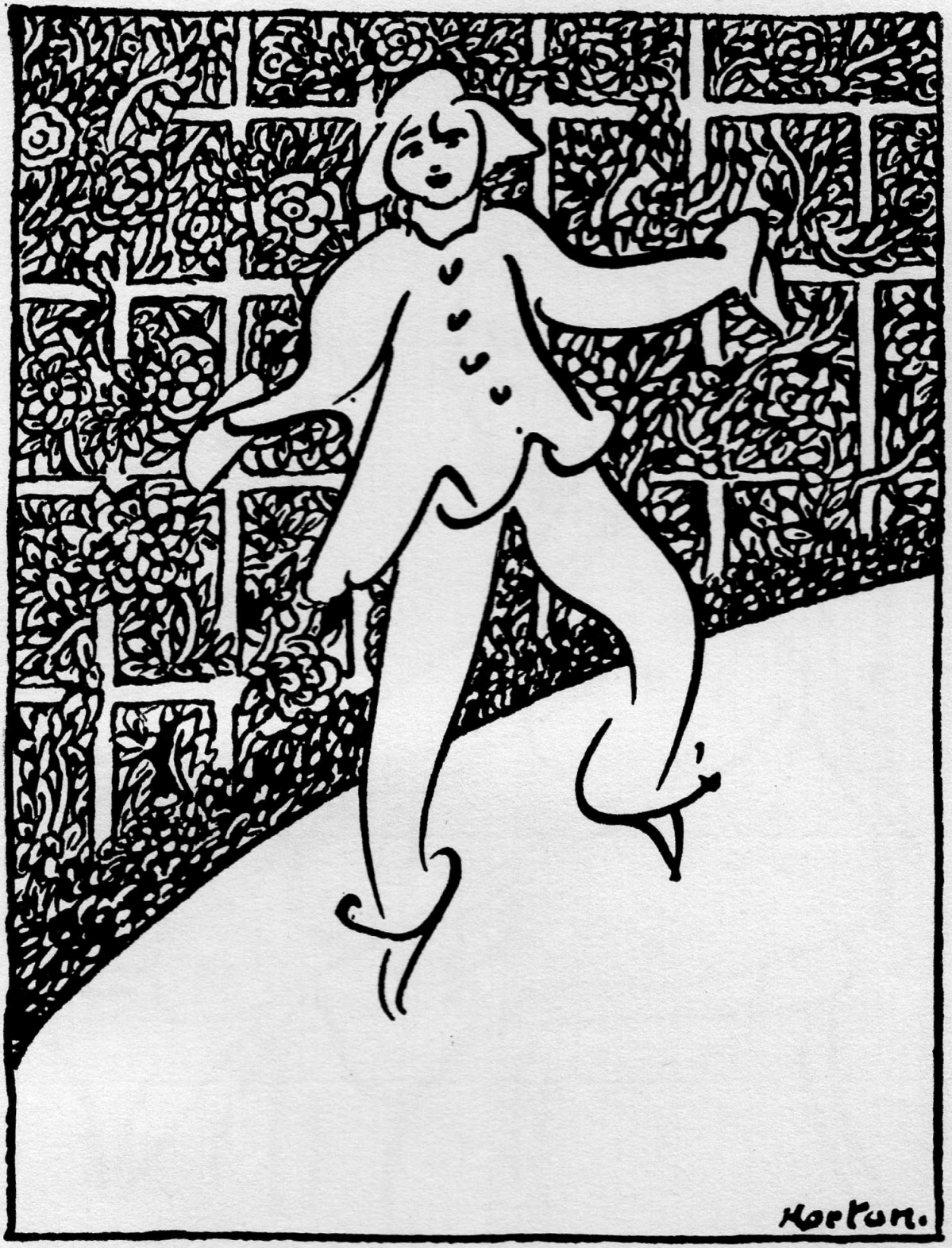
JUNE 27, 1909 DANCING DEVIL



MAY 24, 1912 GOD MOVING ON THE FACE OF THE WATERS

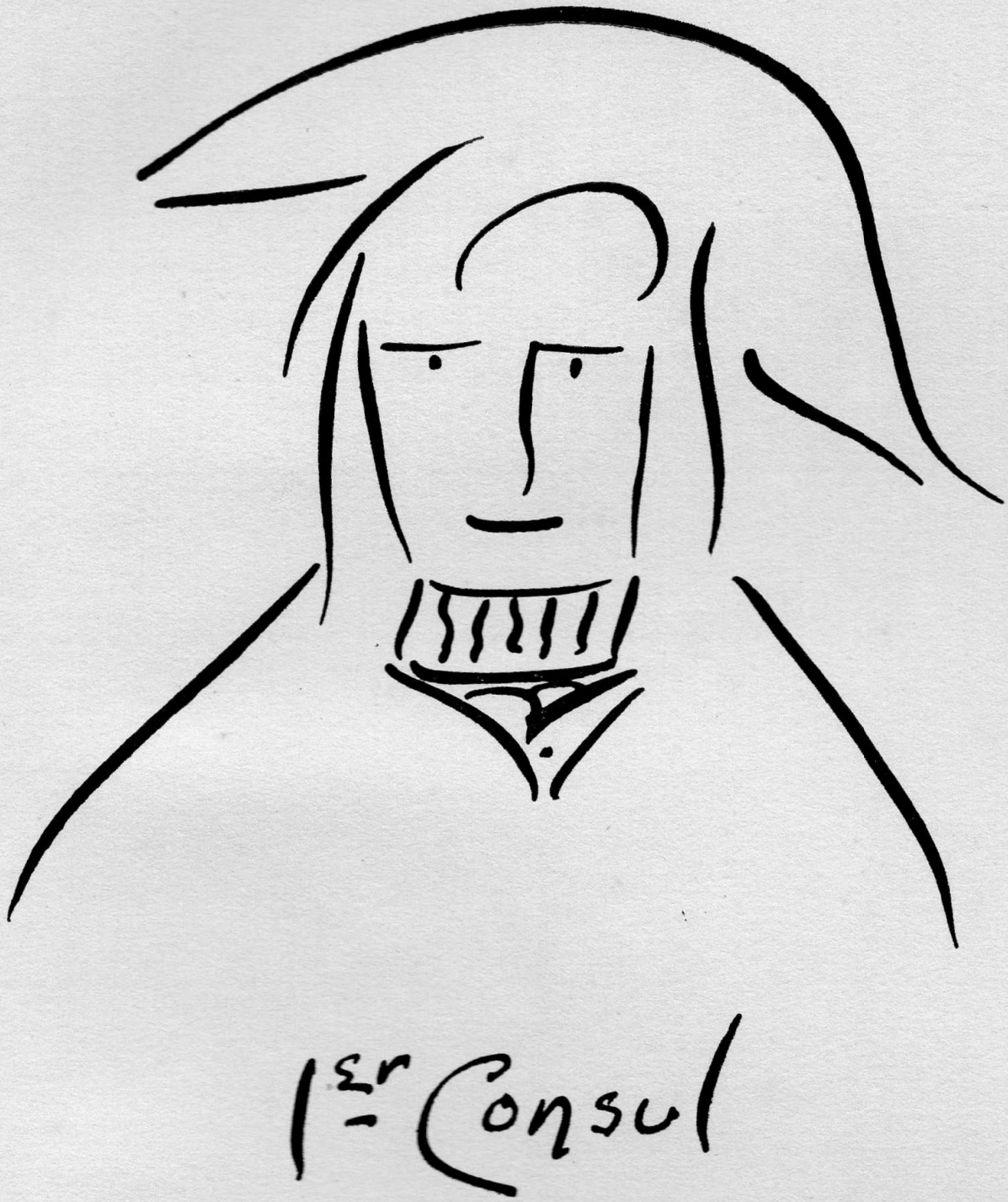


JULY 23, 1913 A REMINISCENCE



MARCH 30, 1915 JOY

MAY 3, 1915 PAINTING



MAY 6, 1915

LE PREMIER CONSUL

Printed and Made in Great Britain by
The Crypt House Press Limited
Gloucester and London